2015

Correcting the Conversation: An Argument for a Public Health Perspective Approach to University Timely Warnings about Sexual Assault

Ashley Hesson
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

CORRECTING THE CONVERSATION: AN ARGUMENT FOR A PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVE APPROACH TO UNIVERSITY TIMELY WARNINGS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

in

The School of Mass Communication

by
Ashley N. Hesson
B.A., Marshall University, 2012
May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Chris Mann. For answering emails on the weekends, reading my work, and encouraging my ideas in your class and during this thesis—thank you.

I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Andrea Miller and Dr. Kasey Windels, for your guidance, patience and interest in this research and my future.

And of course, I am so appreciative of my fiancée and best friend, Will Glass. We met on day one of this Master's program at orientation, and he is at least half of the reason that I did not give up or starve while dedicated to this research. Thank you for loving, supporting and pushing me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Reports of sexual violence should be written from a public health perspective approach to appropriately frame the occurrence and encourage accurate understandings of sexual assault as a larger societal issue. This research consists of two studies to investigate the way universities do (and should) communicate about sexual violence with their students. For Study 1, interviews were conducted with a random sample of public state Universities regarding their emergency alert processes and template usage to determine current emergency communication practices. The majority of universities contacted do not have a template or best practice guidelines in place for creating timely warnings. For Study 2, an experimental test asked participants to read a hypothetical university timely warning message about a sexual assault on campus and take a post-test survey about their perceptions of sexual assault and personal estimation of threat. The experiment tested whether the inclusion of contextualizing statistics and information in the message changed their reported perceptions of rape overall. Results from the study show that a combination approach incorporating both statistics and personal safety strategies had the greatest influence on both threat perception and reported preventative behaviors. This research has significant public policy implications for best practices concerning institutional communication about sexual assault.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research presented here offers an exploration of the current state of university communication about sexual assault and suggests best practices for these messages based on the public health perspective approach. This thesis considers official university communication about sexual assault on university campuses, and specifically the messaging that universities do (or should) send about the crime to their student bodies. Some of the most important voices communicating about violence and sexual assault are university campus officials. Statistics reveal that between 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 women will be victims of sexual violence by the time they graduate from college (Tjaden, Thoennes, 2000; White House Task Force, 2014; Who Are The Victims, n.d.). These numbers show that rape is not an issue of isolated occurrences, but episodic framing of reports can make it seem like it is. This thesis argues that a public health perspective approach to university communications about sexual assault can influence student perceptions to more accurately understand the threat of sexual assault on campus.

The first major theoretical framework for this research is framing. People process messages in response to framing. Messages with thematic frames tend to help people understand topics more accurately, where episodic frames lead people to believe that events are isolated (Hallahan, 1999; Iyengar, 1990). Thematic framing is important for communication about crime because it puts an event in the context of the larger societal problem, whereas episodic framing tells the same story from a more individual perspective and can make events feel

unconnected (Iyengar, 1990). Episodic framing regarding sexual assault can lead to blaming the victim, and misunderstanding the circumstances that lead to sexual assault and its consequences, but thematic framing can help with the understanding that it is part of a larger societal problem (Gross, 2008; Iyengar, 1990, 1991). Putting sexual assault into context is necessary to promote accurate understanding and appropriate choices.

Scholars argue that a public health perspective approach to reporting is necessary for audiences to have an accurate understanding of societal problems and emphasizes efforts that decrease the likelihood of violence occurring (Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, & Wallack, 1997; Haegerich & Dahlberg, 2011; McMahon, 2000; Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome, & Roper, 1993; Perry, 2009). The main purpose of the public health perspective is to encourage a thematic conversation about issues that affect a healthy society (Perry, 2009, p. 372). The public health perspective requires context, risk factors and prevention strategies, which encourage an understanding of health issues like violence as larger societal problems (Coleman & Thorson, 2002, p. 402). Crime is in part a symptom of a society that treats violence in a problematic isolated way without addressing prevention, risk factors, or the consequences to society beyond the harm to victims. A public health approach to sexual assault reporting would use thematic message frames, and thus help to promote a more accurate understanding of the crime overall.

Since the passing of the Federal Campus Security Act (also called the Jeanne Clery Act), universities are required to send “timely warning” updates to

students and faculty whenever a violent crime against a person or a major crime against property on campus is reported that the police department determines to represent an ongoing threat to the safety of the campus community (Jeanne Clery Act text, 2008; “Summary Of The Jeanne Clery Act”, 2012). These include homicide, negligent manslaughter, sex offences (forcible or non-forcible), robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft and arson. Although these timely warning messages are required, no guidelines are in place for how these messages should be structured. In particular, there is no guidance on the proper framing for these timely warnings about violent crime - as suggested by the public health perspective.

The first major element of this (Study 1) gathered information about the current state of university communications to students regarding sexual assault. Phone interviews were conducted with a random sample of universities asking how students receive emergency alerts (and from whom), what type of emergencies qualify, if schools use a template when creating emergency alert messages, and if the school publishes the emergency alerts somewhere after distributing them. The second major element of this (Study 2) experimentally tested sample messaging tactics inspired by a thematic public health perspective approach and measured student perceptions. This experiment tested whether including statistics or information about how common rape is – along with the normal campus warning detailing the incident that is required by the Clery Act – would give context to the message and increase participants’ report of 1) frequency – how often they think rape occurs in general and on college

campuses, and 2) personal threat – if they feel safe in their surroundings or feel like they are ever personally at risk for rape.

This project fits into a larger body of literature by addressing an important slice of the larger conversation currently happening around sexual assault: the message transmitted from college and university administration to students at risk. Although the Clery Act requires that universities send timely warning messages to students, no research makes recommendations for their content or context. Talking about sexual assault can be difficult because it is a sensitive issue due to social taboos around public discussion of sex and violence. It can also be particularly tough because presenting something in the wrong way can make it seem like the incident is isolated and not a larger societal problem. This thesis presents a consideration of the current state of university communication about sexual assault and recommends timely warning best practices that can have a significant impact on perceptions based on the public health perspective approach.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Framing

The first major guiding theoretical framework for this research is the theory of framing. The evolution of mass communication theory to incorporate framing and other similar theories of media effects is outlined by Scheufele (1999). In the first stage (1900-1930s), a fear of media influence on attitudes grew from the national experiences with World War I propaganda. Media effects were considered to be powerful enough that people were concerned by their influence. The second stage (lasting through the 1960s) centered on a belief that media effects were limited. This stage of research held that media generally served to reinforce existing beliefs, and effects were minimal even for consumers who subsequently changed their attitudes or behaviors. The third stage (beginning in the 1970s) was driven by a search for powerful effects. Rather than accepting the second stage's belief that media had no powerful influence, this stage in media effects research moved beyond attitudinal influence and considered cognitive influences of media. Finally, he explained that the "fourth and present stage" (beginning in the 1980s and continuing to present) was dominated by the concept of social constructivism (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105). Now, Scheufele argued, strong and limited effects were both considered valuable for different reasons. Media effects are considered limited by their reliance on an interaction between media and its publics (i.e. individuals construct meaning in part through media discourse, yet media and journalists develop meaning through public

discourse), but also powerful in their ability to construct social reality by framing images of that reality (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105).

Framing theory, then, has found its place within mass communication research as responsible for notable media effects through social constructivism. Goffman (1974) was one of the earliest scholars to conceptualize frames. He called them ‘‘schemata of interpretation,’’ and said their role in reality construction was as a framework to help people derive meaning from an otherwise meaningless succession of events (p. 21). According to Goffman, frames help people string together meaning from events in their realities. Another of the most widely cited definitions for framing was given by Entman (1993) who said, “Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Unpacking this definition leads to an understanding that framing involves a process of choosing and highlighting certain elements of an issue or reality as more salient (or noticeable, memorable), while omitting others. Frames, then, define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments or suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). These four purposes of frames suggest that messages with proper framing can lead people to have more accurate attitudes and understandings and make appropriate choices.

Framing influences the way the subject matter is perceived by its audiences. Because attention is called to certain aspects of what is reported,

attention is naturally directed away from other aspects that are either minimized or omitted. Entman (1993) argues that both aspects are critical to understanding the way framing guides an audience. A message frame is often compared to the frame around a painting which "delimits the subject matter and, thus, focuses attention on key elements within" (Hallahan, 1999, p. 207). Scheufele and Iyengar (2014), two of the founding scholars in framing theory, recently published a chapter for Oxford Handbooks revisiting framing and at times critiquing its over-application. This picture frame comparison is used in their chapter to explain its role in mass communication theory:

> Framing is equivalent to the choices that an art dealer or gallery owner may make about how to display a painting. Reactions among potential buyers to a painting displayed in a large, gold plated frame, for instance, will be distinctively different than they would be if the same painting was displayed in a simple aluminum frame. In other words, the art dealer can shape public reactions to the exact same painting based on fairly subtle variations in how she decides to present – or quite literally "frame" – that painting (p. 20).

Borah (2011) explained that framing, "could have significant connotations as frames highlight some aspects of reality while excluding other elements, which might lead individuals to interpret issues differently" (p. 248). In other words, the frame draws attention to a central, specific picture and hides other unnecessary elements from view. For messages, the frame naturally puts some elements of the story (or a particular view of the issue) at its center, and by the very nature of reporting omits other details seen as unnecessary.

The comparison between an art gallery owner and a journalist writing a story has been contested, however, because framing effects are often considered unintentional. When the same issue is reported from several different

sources, it potentially presents the same story from different frames to separate audiences. Objective reporting as a news value attempts to combat framing effects by presenting a clear and complete account. The risk of message framing then becomes apparent if certain audiences are led to see an issue differently simply because of the framing effects.

Episodic vs. Thematic Framing

Borah (2011) contrasted two approaches to current framing research—equivalency and emphasis. The equivalency approach attempts to isolate the effect of the frame itself by presenting different, but logically equivalent, messages (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory). For the emphasis approach, Borah cites Druckman's (2004) explanation that by "emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations" (p. 672), individuals are led to focus on these considerations in the decision-making process. Within the emphasis approach, a division of framing theory of particular relevance to this paper is episodic / thematic framing.

Episodic and thematic framing research often cites Iyengar's (1990) study of the news coverage of poverty. This study yielded important findings about the effects of framing on attitudes, but also served as a foundational study for episodic and thematic frame literature. For this research, Iyengar (1990) operationalized these two concepts—in a thematic frame, the news would discuss general trends like statistics, definitions, etc. or matters of public policy giving context and ties to the larger issues involved; in an episodic frame, the news would cover poverty in terms of personal experience, or give an example of

a particular family giving no ties to broader problems. His experiment manipulated the content/frame of a television segment presented to participants, and then measured their attitudes about the issue and attribution of responsibility following the experiment. Iyengar's (1990) study revealed that stories depicting poverty as a "collective outcome" (rather than as a specific poor person) had significant effects on attitudes and attribution of responsibility—i.e. thematic framing led to participants more often attributing responsibility to both the individual and institutions involved, while episodic framing led to mostly assignment of responsibility on the individuals. Audiences who are presented thematic stories understand that the responsibility for problems is shared between individuals and their institutions, and are more likely to recognize that the government or other institutions have a role in solving societal problems.

Hallahan's (1999) paper explained the following distinction between episodic and thematic framing:

> Episodic framing involves storytelling from the perspective of people and individual events. Audiences are believed to be more interested in people and more responsive to portrayals involving concrete events and actions (episodes). By contrast, media engage in comparatively little thematic framing, where stories are told more broadly from a societal perspective using abstract concepts instead of case studies or exemplars. An unintended consequence of the preponderance of episodic framing is that audiences feel absolved of responsibility for social problems because responsibility is so readily attributed to the people portrayed in the news, whether or not the newsmakers depicted are culpable (p. 221).

This supports Iyengar's (1991) findings, that episodic framing encourages a "morselized" understanding of societal harms by presenting recurring problems as isolated instances (p. 136). Gross (2008) explained this same concept in her research, that "citizens exposed to a steady stream of episodic frames fail to see

the connections between problems such as poverty, racial discrimination, and crime when they are presented as discrete and unconnected" (p. 171). Audiences often consider news presented with episodic frames to be reports of single incidents, and therefore have difficulty extrapolating the report to its proper societal implications. Messages with thematic frames tend to help people understand events more accurately because it puts an event into the context of the larger societal problem, where episodic frames lead people to believe that events are isolated in nature.

Many studies have explored newspaper reporting for problematic framing and effects, finding that episodic frames are extraordinarily common. Dorfman et al. (1997) conducted a content analysis of local TV news in California looking for episodic and thematic frames in coverage of youth violence. Their key findings were that local TV news was "dominated" by coverage of violence, and episodic framing was more than five times as prevalent as thematic framing (p. 1311). Iyengar (1991) also noted that TV news stories were predominantly episodic in nature in his content analysis study. Gross (2008) explains that journalists often use an episodic frame when reporting because "they believe them to be more compelling and more likely to draw the reader or viewer into the story" (p. 171). As previously mentioned, objective reporting is a news value that attempts to combat framing effects—although journalists largely present reports of violence through an episodic lens, this does not necessarily reveal that the effect is purposeful, and that the journalist's intention is to portray the incident as an isolated event.

Contextualizing Violence

With this in mind, researchers have considered the misconceptions that the public holds about violent crime and began questioning journalistic reporting standards for crime. Stevens (1998) argues that because news organizations do not regularly inform readers about the status of the different types of violence reported for their communities, “readers and viewers are rarely given enough information to put reported violent incidents into context to know what violence is “usual” and able to be prevented, and what is “unusual” and thus unlikely to be preventable” (p. 38). Scott Decker, a criminologist, when asked for the future direction that reporting on crime should take said, “I think it’s important to find a context for crime. Individual crimes very rarely occur without becoming part of a broader context, not only of culture, not only of societal institutions, but also compared to other crimes” (Bishop, 1993, p. 3). An episodic framing structure leads publics to have inaccurate estimates of the nature of societal issues (Bishop, 1993; Coleman & Thorson, 2002; Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, & Wallack, 1997; Iyengar, 1990). Those who study violence criticize episodic news frames for presenting inaccurate pictures of crime to its viewers, and therefore misrepresenting or ignoring the future considerations to be made from patterns of violence.

Reporting focused on individual events or persons rather than societal problems broadly has also been criticized for distracting readers from the larger issue of how to control and solve the problem at hand (Iyengar, 1990). Since surprising findings in 1977 about the high prevalence of violent crime leading to

deaths, physicians and researchers have classified violence as an epidemic problem for society (Stevens, 1998). Violence has since been categorized with other known epidemics like lung cancer and heart disease, and epidemiologists use similar methodology to reduce and control violence such as defining risk factors and developing methods to prevent injury or death (Stevens, 1998). When violence is handled like an epidemic problem and reported on as such by authorities and news, it is more likely to be seen as a larger issue and audiences are able to then consider how to control or solve the problem. Putting violence into context and considering it as an epidemic problem is necessary to promote accurate understandings of crime.

Because episodic frames are so commonly used in reporting, it is also important to consider the implications this has on attribution of responsibility when reporting on crime and violence. Gross (2008) eloquently stated the central problem here, which is that episodic framing, “diverts attention from societal responsibility and leads people to hold individuals responsible for their own predicaments, thereby dampening support for government programs designed to address problems and shielding leaders from responsibility” (p. 171). Episodic framing of crime reports can lead to misattribution of responsibility for the circumstances onto the victim of the crime, or “hold(ing) individuals responsible for their own predicaments” as well as lowering public support for programs addressing the societal issues which contribute to the problem (Gross, 2008, p. 171). Applied to the current study, episodic framing regarding sexual assault can lead to blaming the victim through misunderstanding the circumstances that

surround or lead to sexual assault, and thematic framing can help with the understanding that this issue is part of a larger societal problem.

Reporting violence in terms of a thematic frame is considered a good communication practice because it gives context to the crime reported. For journalists, objective reporting is a news value which promotes clear and complete accounts of the event being described. Journalists are often trained to be aware of and avoid unintentional framing effects on their stories, while epidemiologists argue for intentionally framing a message about violence in a certain way (with a thematic frame) to provide context. Ultimately, though, both parties share the same end goal. A normative agreement exists between scholars who argue for contextualizing violence and journalists who intend to provide complete accounts—an outcome of an informed society is desired by both.

Perceived Invulnerability

Another important consideration in the conversation surrounding reports of sexual violence is perceived invulnerability. Perceived invulnerability is the tendency for an individual to believe they are more likely to experience positive or non-negative outcomes and that others are more likely to experience negative outcomes (Morrison, 2005). A study conducted by Morrison in 1994 (as cited in Morrison, 2005) found that most women believed rape to be a serious problem; however, after viewing a persuasive message that included a recommendation for a self-defense class they did not enroll in self-defense classes. Morrison's unpublished 1995 (as cited in Morrison, 2005) focus group of female

undergraduate students found that women's invulnerability perception increased when women did not personally know other female rape victims and consequently they viewed rape as not being a serious threat. Research shows an inclination for women to be overly optimistic in terms of personal risk perception toward sexual assault when the threat does not seem close to them personally. Similarly, because we talk about violence broadly as if it is not a societal issue but an episodic problem, people are more likely to feel invulnerability about crime, justly or not. Episodic reporting has the power to frame societal issues as isolated events without broader consequences, and this inevitably contributes to perceived invulnerability. The threat of sexual assault does not seem personal to people who read the reports because episodic framing distances an issue—it causes a crime to sound like it only affects specific other people rather than existing as a broad problem affecting society and posing a risk for anyone.

Next is the question of how these reports of violence *should* be structured to properly communicate about crime.

Public Health Perspective

The second major guiding theoretical framework for this research is the public health perspective. Though referred to across disciplines by various similar titles (the public health model, perspective, approach, framework, movement, practice, etc.) this thesis will use the term "public health perspective" for this concept. The public health perspective is one that recognizes violence as a multifaceted societal problem. Broadly, the public health perspective is concerned with "assuring the conditions for a healthy society" (Perry, 2009, p.

372). Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome and Roper (1993) argue that the public health perspective "in action" identifies risk factors and develops prevention strategies. According to Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, and Wallack (1997), approaching violence from a public health perspective emphasizes "1) preventing violence before it occurs, 2) using science and surveillance to identify effective policies and programs, and 3) drawing on the efforts of diverse disciplines and communities in a collaborative approach" (p. 1311).

Scholars who apply the public health perspective to violence describe it as one that focuses on prevention before a crime has been committed and emphasizes efforts that decrease the likelihood of violence occurring (Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, & Wallack, 1997; Haegerich & Dahlberg, 2011; McMahon, 2000; Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome, & Roper, 1993; Perry, 2009). A public health perspective methodology is shown to "help readers learn more about the context in which crime and violence occurs, endorse prevention strategies in addition to punishment, and be more attuned to societal risk factors and causes of crime and violence" (Coleman & Thorson, 2002, p. 402).

The public health perspective, then, asks reporters covering violence to write their stories incorporating context, risk factors and prevention strategies. This concept, however, has been slow to catch on, with researchers still finding that reporters fail to consider context when reporting violence. Rodgers and Thorson (2001) summarize that, "despite the fact that physicians, public health experts, epidemiologists, and social scientists now use the public health model to study violence, it seems clear that newspapers do not" (p. 169). In their content

analysis of crime news in the LA Times, Rodgers and Thorson (2001) found that violence and crime reporting was presented predominantly as isolated incidents "and not patterns that were caused by factors that should themselves be examined" (p. 178) as a public health perspective recommends. Research shows that an episodic frame or a report of a violent act with no context leads to a public misunderstanding of the crime as isolated incidents. "While a thematic frame is not necessarily synonymous with a public health approach, broader coverage that includes etiological factors contributing to violence is consistent with a public health approach" (Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez & Wallack, 1997, p. 1312). The suggested fix here is incorporation of public health perspective strategies in reporting. Viewing violence through the lens of the public health perspective allows for an understanding that crime is a societal problem and not isolated or episodic in nature.

College Campuses / Clery Act

The conversation around violence on college campuses has developed over the past three decades due in part to the tragic story of one girl—Jeanne Clery. Jeanne was in her freshman year at Lehigh University when she was found dead in her dorm room in April 1987. Josoph Henry, a fellow student, broke into Jeanne's room to rob it at 6 a.m. after an "all night drinking binge" and killed Jeanne in her room, who was "raped, sodomized, beaten, bitten, strangled with a metal coil and mutilated with a broken bottle" during the attack (Gross & Fine, 1990, para. 1). After an investigation it became clear that Henry, who did not know Jeanne before that day, reached Jeanne's room by passing through

three automatic-locking doors which were all propped open with pizza boxes by other students for convenience (Gross & Fine, 1990). When Henry went to trial for the crime, Jeanne's parents learned of the security lapses at Lehigh and filed a suit against the school for negligence that launched a full scale crusade for campus security (Gross & Fine, 1990). Jeanne's murder should not have happened. But her death fueled a cause for awareness about (and safety from) violent crime on college campuses nationwide.

After discovering that Lehigh students had not been told about 38 violent crimes on campus including rape, robbery, and assault in the three years before Jeanne's death, her parents founded the Clery Center for Security On Campus (formerly Security On Campus, Inc.) (Center for Public Integrity, 2010; "Our History," 2012). This organization's mission initially was to create a questionnaire for parents to take with them to schools that requests information on crime rates, security procedures, dorm guards, alarm and lock systems, drug and alcohol policies, etc. (Gross & Fine, 1990). Tens of thousands of requests came in for the questionnaire, and the organization expanded and evolved—and went to Washington (Gross & Fine, 1990; "Our History," 2012). The Campus Security Act became a Pennsylvania state law and served as a foundation for the federal version. In 1990 Congress approved the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act, more often referred to as the Jeanne Clery Act (Center for Public Integrity, 2010; Gross & Fine, 1990; "Our History," 2012). The Clery Act required "colleges and universities to disclose their security policies, keep a public crime log, publish an annual crime report and provide timely warnings to students and

campus employees about a crime posing an immediate or ongoing threat to students and campus employees" ("Our History," 2012).

Two years later, the Clery Act was amended to include a "Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights" to ensure that survivors are notified of their options for notifying law enforcement, attending counseling services, arranging new academic or housing situations, and the opportunity to have others present for meetings and proceedings. ("Federal Campus Sexual Assault," 2012, para. 1). It has been nearly 30 years since Jeanne Clery's attack, and her parents' crusade to help make students aware and improve the campus conversation about violence continues on. Today the Clery Act is enforced by the federal Department of Education as a requirement for all colleges and universities that participate in federal financial aid programs (Center for Public Integrity, 2010). Institutions found not in compliance can be fined as much as $27,500 per violation, and can be suspended from participating in federal student financial aid programs (Center for Public Integrity, 2010).

To comply with the Clery Act, schools are responsible for implementing the following, summarized from "Summary of the Jeanne Clery Act" (2012):

- Publish and distribute an annual security report (ASR) that includes three years of crime statistics, campus security policies, and the basic rights guaranteed to victims of sexual assault
- Maintain a daily public crime log
- Disclose crime statistics for incidents that occur on campus for 7 major categories of crime:

    - Criminal homicide
        - Murder and non-negligent manslaughter
        - Negligent manslaughter
    - Sex offenses
        - Forcible
        - Non-forcible (Statutory, Incest)
    - Robbery
    - Aggravated Assault
    - Burglary – with unlawful entry made in order to commit a felony or theft
    - Motor vehicle theft
    - Arson
- Issue timely warnings about Clery Act crimes which pose a serious or ongoing threat to students and employees
- Create an emergency response policy
- Publish an annual fire safety report
- Enact procedures to handle reports of missing students

Thanks to the Clery Act, public universities have specific guidelines for communicating with their students regarding violent crime on campus. Unfortunately, it still has “proven notoriously difficult for college administrators to decipher and uphold partly because of the vague definitions of crimes and partly because of the large universe of school officials who must be polled when gathering annual statistics” (Center for Public Integrity, 2010, p. 13). Additionally,

enforcement and guidance from the Department of Education has been sparse and unclear, and the Clery Act handbook explaining “all the unique reporting provisions” wasn’t released to schools until 2005—almost 15 years after the law was passed (Center for Public Integrity, 2010, p. 13).

Karjane, Fisher and Cullen (2002) conducted a thorough report of university institutional response to sexual assault on campus, including analysis of written policies in place for handling reports, a survey of administrators, legal statutory and case law review, field research and focus groups with campus administrators. Their findings indicated that universities consistently mishandle certain aspects of reporting, including the fact that only 36.5 percent of schools reported crime statistics in a way that was fully consistent with the Clery Act (Karjane, Fisher & Cullen, 2002). They also cited as problems that there was no standard definition for rape and sexual assault across institutions and states, and that students often do not identify and define their victimizations which qualify for the legal definition of the crime as rape or sexual assault (Karjane, Fisher & Cullen, 2002).

Bearing in mind that sexual assault is grossly underreported, Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) estimates that “as many as 350 rapes per 10,000 students" occur on university campuses per year (Campus Safety, n.d.; see also Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). This estimate scales per number of students; i.e., at a school the size of LSU (30,000 students), there could be as many as 1,050 rapes every year. Whether due to underreporting, ineffective

student alert procedures, or university mishandling of this issue, universities generally report significantly fewer incidents per year than are estimated to occur.

President Obama created the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault in 2014 with a mandate to strengthen federal enforcement efforts and provide schools with tools to combat sexual assault on their campuses (White House Task Force, 2014). “Not Alone” is the title of the first report by this task force, which called on universities to improve their policies regarding sexual assault in several areas. The report called for climate surveys to learn the extent of the problem at each university, enacting prevention programs and researching new ideas, engaging men as allies, effectively responding when a student reports (namely: a confidential person to file a complaint to, a comprehensive sexual misconduct policy, trauma training for school officials, and better school disciplinary systems), and increased transparency and enforcement efforts (White House Task Force, 2014). This report extensively addressed many major problems with university handling of sexual assault, and also contributed to societal awareness of sexual assault as a larger problem. President Obama’s introductory quote in this report said:

> Sexual violence is more than just a crime against individuals. It threatens our families, it threatens our communities; ultimately, it threatens the entire country. It tears apart the fabric of our communities. And that’s why we’re here today – because we have the power to do something about it as a government, as a nation. We have the capacity to stop sexual assault, support those who have survived it, and bring perpetrators to justice (White House Task Force, 2014, p. ii).

This statement is an excellent example of thematic framing and a public health perspective approach to discussing violence and crime as a broader problem.

This report also announced many tools that the task force would be releasing to help schools comply and improve their practices, including trauma-informed training materials for campus officials, sample policy language, a checklist for an appropriate sexual misconduct policy, a sample reporting and confidentiality policy, factsheets on bystander intervention, new clarifying guidance from the Department of Education on school's legal obligations, and more (White House Task Force, 2014). This task force and its subsequent reports and tools for universities were clearly a leap in the right direction.

Rape and sexual assault on college campuses has received a great deal of coverage recently in the media. From student activists to the White House, people nationally are talking about how to best serve victims of this crime, and what responsibilities a school has when this crime happens. Sexual assault on college campuses was the cover story for *Time* magazine's issue the week of May 26th, 2014 (Gray, 2014). Over the past three years, students at several universities publicly accused their institutions of mishandling their personal rape reports, and their stories drew national attention and widespread coverage online. One such student was Emma Sulkowicz, who pledged in September to carry her mattress around campus every day until the university took action and her rapist was expelled (Culp-Ressler, 2014). In October, dozens of other students joined her in a protest on campus coining the slogan "Carry That Weight" (Schonfeld, 2014). Two independent documentaries, "It Happened Here" (released January 2015) and "Hunting Ground" (released March 2015), tackled student activism in response to university mishandling of sexual assault (Kingkade, 2015).

The national attention from these and many other efforts over the past few years have encouraged some schools to adjust the attention paid to this problem and to try to correct this reporting to meet Clery Act requirements. For example, in 2012 the University of Montana reported 80 occurrences of rape on campus over 3 years—a much more realistic report of how common this crime is, if still incomplete. Unfortunately, U Montana became colloquially (and unfairly) called "America's Rape Capital" following this report, rather than praised for its transparency (Gray, 2014). RAINN's statistics about the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses make it clear that the University of Montana is not an outlier by any means, but universities face an understandable reluctance to reporting high statistics and being stigmatized as "a rape school" (Campus Safety, n.d.). Stricter reporting policies is an effective tactic in improving transparency about this crime, but these statistics need to be accompanied by a societal understanding that rape is not rare and incidents are not isolated to avoid unfair stigmas against universities.

Although the Clery Act requires timely warning messages be sent to the student body when a threat to campus is ongoing, no research has yet been done on the most appropriate way to write these messages. The public health perspective has been applied to journalistic reporting, discussion of violence in news, and discussion of epidemic health issues such as obesity or lung cancer, but no literature applies this framework to institutional communication about sexual assault. If the public health perspective asks reporters covering violence to write their stories incorporating context, risk factors and prevention strategies

(Coleman & Thorson, 2002, p. 402), this same logic can be applied to institutional reports of violence—namely, university timely warnings about sexual assault. No literature has yet considered the impact of the structure of these messages in the way journalistic reporting has been examined under the public health perspective.

A gap in the literature therefore exists in the examination of best practices for these timely warning messages. The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault has examined the implementation of sexual assault protocols, if universities have emergency management plans in place, fair treatment of the student victim, and general preparedness to handle reports of sexual assault, but guidelines for timely warnings do not go far enough. Universities are required to produce them but the White House reports for best practices do not address the content of these required timely warning messages. Sexual assault is most commonly a crime committed by someone that the victim already knew (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Although “acquaintance rape” is the most common form of sexual assault, timely warning notifications are only required for incidents where the university deems that there is an ongoing threat to the campus community—this loosely allows universities to exclude many instances of acquaintance rape using this definition because the perpetrator of this crime is identifiable. Research combatting this mentality shows that most rapes are committed by repeat offenders (White House Task Force, 2014), however, the precedent exists that generally timely warnings are written for cases of “stranger rape.” Although stranger rapes only

represent a piece of the larger problem, the way a university handles their timely warning communications about stranger rapes should be indicative of how they handle the broader issue. Stranger rape reports through university timely warnings represent the tip of the iceberg that we are able to see for this very deep problem. Therefore, this thesis fills a necessary gap in the literature – and public policy discussions – by providing an exploration of the current state of university emergency alert communications about sexual assault and then experimentally tests the addition of contextualizing information to university timely warnings on student perceptions of sexual assault to suggest best practices for timely warning construction.

Research Questions

Based on these concerns about framing and perceived invulnerability is the question of how appropriately universities handle reports to their students of crime incidents on campus. Since violent crime incidents that pose an ongoing threat to the student body must be reported, a look at how those messages are structured could provide insight into the misunderstandings that exist about sexual assault as a crime. This guided this study's first research question:

RQ1: What is the current state of institutional communication within Universities about sexual assault to their student bodies?

Contextualizing violence with respect to a public health perspective of reporting about crime is shown to create more accurate understandings of crime as a societal problem with warning signs and consequences rather than as isolated incidents. Since communication about some instances of sexual assault

is required by the Clery Act, if these reports were accompanied by information that furthered a public health perspective understanding of this crime, it could lead to more accurate perceptions by students of the nature of the crime itself. Additionally, research repeatedly finds that women encounter a higher risk of victimization while in college than women in the general population or even in comparable age groups (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2002). If university reported incidents of sexual assault could appropriately influence understandings of the crime as a broader public health problem, it could potentially help students mitigate the effects of perceived invulnerability, practice safer behaviors and appropriately attribute responsibility for sexual violence. Taken together, the public health perspective led to this study's last two research questions:

RQ2: Will the inclusion of rape statistics and/or contextualizing information in university communication messages about sexual assault influence perception of the frequency of rape occurrences?

RQ3: Will the inclusion of rape statistics and contextualizing information in university communication messages about sexual assault influence personal estimation of threat and reported preventative behaviors with regard to rape?

Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses were derived from the preceding literature and align with the three research questions for this study:

H1: University communication messages about sexual assault are largely unsystematic and the persons who write them largely do not intentionally follow best practices for communicating about violence.

H2: The inclusion of rape statistics and contextualizing information in University communication messages about sexual assault will increase perception of the frequency of rape occurrences.

H3: The inclusion of rape statistics and contextualizing information in University communication messages about sexual assault will increase personal estimation of threat with regard to rape, and will increase reported preventative behaviors.

3. METHODS

To test these hypotheses, this thesis consists of two major elements: 1) interviews addressing RQ1, and 2) an experimental study addressing RQ2 and RQ3.

Study 1

This research first investigated the current state of institutional communication by Universities about sexual assault to their student bodies. To determine the current practices used by universities when contacting their students with emergency alert messages, phone interviews were conducted with the department responsible for writing and sending the timely warning emergency alerts at a random sample of state universities. Among the interview topics was a question asking if a template is used when emergency alerts are written—universities who responded yes were asked to submit a copy of their template or a copy of a previously written message for this research. The preparedness of universities to communicate appropriately with their student bodies following an incident of this nature is considered, based on the results of the interviews and whether Universities reported having templates for these messages in place. This methodology was chosen to address the first research question because it involved directly collecting information from university personnel about their emergency alert processes and preparedness, and then examined the types of content that schools who work from a template intentionally include in messaging about a sexual assault. This process allowed

the researcher to explore the structure currently in place within universities for this type of communication with their student bodies.

Each university handles school-wide emergency communication differently, so for these interviews it was necessary to ensure that the respondent worked for the appropriate department (Campus police, Public Safety department, University communications, etc.) responsible for writing and distributing the timely warning emergency alert messages. Because of this, before collecting the contact phone numbers for each university in the sample a precursory search was conducted of the university's website for information revealing the responsible department. Searches were mainly conducted on the webpages for university directories, police departments, public safety departments or university communications departments, when each were available. Often, a university public safety department website would name a "director of emergency communications" or refer all emergency preparedness questions to the university chief of police. For universities who revealed this, the contact information for the appropriate department or department head was used. For universities with no individual phone numbers listed for coordinators or emergency-specific departments, the general police nonemergency phone number was used first. As an additional check that the person being interviewed was the appropriate contact for this research, the introductory script said that the researcher was conducting interviews with the person responsible for writing and distributing emergency alert communications to the school's student body.

Sample. A random sample of universities was selected to contact and interview from public 4-year institutions in the US. Public 4-year institutions were chosen for the initial population because the communication mandates from the Clery Act law are requirements for colleges and universities that participate in federal financial aid programs (Center for Public Integrity, 2010). A CollegeBoard.org search for public 4-year institutions provides a list of 624 universities. This data nearly matches the reported statistic by infoplease.com for this figure (they report 629), so I used this CollegeBoard list as the initial population. Next, the list was narrowed to only include schools in the 50 U.S. states and branch/satellite campuses were removed from the population. Branch and/or satellite campuses were removed from the population because emergency communication is generally handled for branches by a central department at a main campus (Schuman, 2009). These adjustments gave a remaining list of 391 main university campuses in the U.S. for the sampling frame.

The list of institutions was then randomly ordered and called sequentially. When a spokesperson from the appropriate department was reached, the researcher asked if they had time then for the interview, or if a future appointment should be scheduled. Each school was given up to three attempts at completed contact, beginning with an initial phone call and completing follow-up calls, leaving callback numbers or voicemails, etc. as necessary. Completed interviews were conducted with a total sample of 23 schools. Further calls were discontinued because of the clear pattern revealed in the data received in the initial planned calling timeframe.

Procedure. This study involved a series of short phone interviews with the departments responsible for writing and distributing emergency alerts for each contacted institution. A guiding interview script was written for the researcher to follow to ensure that all necessary topics and issues were covered. This script gave a specific question order to be followed, but allowed for flexibility to respond to additional details or concerns given by the participants. Participants were briefed before beginning the interview, and the researcher defined the purpose of the interview and the scope of the study. Participants were informed that any transcript or notes made during the interview would be kept confidential and when results of the study were used (for this thesis) or published that no names or identifying information will be included. Finally, the participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and were given an opportunity to ask questions before starting the interview.

After agreeing to participate, the interview script then guided the researcher through the interview questions. These questions asked: how students receive emergency alerts, if enrollment in emergency messaging is a voluntary (opt-in) system or a mandatory (opt-out) system, from which department the messages are sent, what type of emergencies qualify for an emergency notification, if schools use a template when creating emergency alert messages or write them as needed, and if the school publishes the emergency alerts online after distributing them or keeps record internally. Following the interviews, if a school reported that they use a template when writing their messages, the researcher requested a copy of their template kept on file. No

universities provided a copy of the template used when writing emergency alert messages, but three schools provided an example of a message that they had sent in the past for this purpose. A full list of the interview questions used for this research is given in Appendix B.

To analyze the interviews, thorough notes were taken to document the responses given by each university to each question. Each interview question addressed key preparedness information regarding emergency school-wide communication, and the researcher examined these processes as a whole. These responses were analyzed using a thematic analysis, and major themes were found among individual interview responses. A thematic analysis approach looks for keywords and major thematic elements to develop codes and themes from the raw data itself (Boyatzis, 1998). First, a codebook was created to group and analyze the interview responses, and determine the current state of university communication about sexual assault. Then, the researcher followed Boyatzis's (1998) inductive/data-driven approach to group the responses within each question into categories that could then be further examined for their application of best practices communication and a public health perspective approach to communicating about sexual violence.

IRB approval for this research was obtained February 16, 2015 (approval #E9192). A copy of the IRB approval notice is given in Appendix A. All initial phone calls, follow-ups, and completed interviews were conducted in the course of two and a half weeks between February 23, 2015 and March 12, 2015.

Study 2

The second major element of this research was an investigation of the influences that different types of content included in university communication messages reporting campus sexual assault had on college student perceptions of the crime. An experimental study presented participants with a timely warning emergency alert describing a sexual assault incident on campus. Students either saw a standard alert, or one of three modified alerts with contextualizing information added. All students then answered the same post-test survey to measure their perceptions of campus sexual assault, and the difference in responses between contextualizing conditions and the control will be discussed. This methodology was chosen to answer the last two research questions because an experiment isolates the addition of context as the difference between the experimental groups. This allows for the assumption that the differing content explains the difference in student responses, and can provide insight about the most appropriate content to include in timely warning emergency alert templates about sexual assault. This experiment measured perception of rape with regard to frequency and personal estimation of threat. The treatment conditions give context to the occurrence (using a thematic frame), which without this addition could be understood as an isolated event (episodic frame). By providing information that can mitigate this potential misunderstanding of the nature of rape itself, the treatment condition tests the concept that the added information can impact student perceptions of sexual assault as a crime.

Outcome Variables. Two outcome variables had particular meaning to this experiment: frequency and threat perception. Here, frequency was conceptually defined as how often the participant believes that sexual assault occurs and threat perception was defined as participants sensing danger within their immediate surroundings regarding sexual assault. Frequency was measured as the perception that the participant has of how often they think sexual assault happens to college students and in general and of how many incidents occur on a campus the size of their university each year. Threat perception asked for the perception that the participant has of how safe/threatened they personally feel about sexual assault, using Senn & Dzinas's (1996) Fear of Rape Scale. Their study defined fear of rape as "the emotional and behavioral responses to the possibility of rape victimization, which includes behavioral adjustments taken to minimize the likelihood of that victimization (Senn & Dzinas, 1996, p. 141).

Sample. Because university students are the target recipients of these emergency communication messages, this study recruited a sample population of currently enrolled university student participants. This experiment was administered as a web survey to the undergraduate student subject pool available through the Media Effects Lab at LSU (the home university for this research). The student subject pool is recruited with course credit or extra-credit in courses in mass communication and political science to participate in a variety of studies. Students voluntarily select which studies to participate in among the studies available. All subjects were over 18 years of age at the time of the study.

All data was collected in one and a half weeks between February 25, 2015 and March 6, 2015. During this time, 203 participants completed at least some portion of the experiment. Cases where the participant either stopped in the middle of the experiment without finishing or did not give a response to 2 or more questions in the post-test survey were excluded from analysis. This gave a total participant population of 193 to be used for data analysis.

For the nature of this analysis (comparing means, measuring group differences, conducting t-tests and running ANOVA tests) the accepted benchmark for the minimum number of participants given a medium to large effect size is 30 per cell, or 30 per treatment condition for 80% power (Cohen, 1988; VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007, p. 48). Therefore, with a significance level of alpha = .05, a sample of at least 120 students was necessary for significance among the four treatment conditions. In total, a participant population of 193 was recruited for this study and a minimum of 47 (maximum of 50) participants were assigned to each treatment condition, exceeding this minimum requirement.

Procedure. The first screen in the experiment displayed the consent agreement for participation in the study. The agreement detailed the purpose and scope of the research study, study procedures and listed risks and benefits to the participant. It also informed participants of the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time, and explained measures that would be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all responses. By selecting Agree, participants accepted the terms of the research study and were taken to the beginning of the study.

Participants who agreed to participate then saw the following message: “Please read the bulletin below and answer the questions on the following screens,” and were then shown a message presented as a university timely warning communication. In a between-subjects design, a control condition showed a sample university communication e-mail message (text-based), and three treatment conditions each added a short paragraph of text to the original message giving additional context, statistics or both, informing about the crime as a whole. To make the purpose of each treatment condition more apparent throughout analysis of the study, this thesis will refer to them as Statistics, Strategies and Combination, respectively.

The Control condition gave a standard message typically used for timely warning messages—this gives a description of the reported crime and offers a call to action for anyone with further information to contact the university police. This condition was created by modifying details from an actual university template message for this type of alert. This standard message is emblematic of an episodic frame, and not consistent with a public health perspective approach, because it does not include any context for the warning and simply reports the incident as an isolated occurrence. The following three treatment conditions added a short paragraph of context between the crime details and call to action. Statistics added context by including statistics for the frequency of rape on college campuses, with the intention of making the frequency of the crime more salient in this condition. Strategies added context by including personal safety recommendations, with the intention of making the personal risk more salient in

this condition. Combination added context by including both manipulations (statistics and personal safety recommendations) to test the influence of both used together. These three treatments all test variations of a thematic frame for a report of violence. Statistics adds information that should make the crime not seem like an isolated occurrence, Strategies adds information that should make the crime seem like it has an effect on more than simply the victims of the report, but has an ongoing societal effect and poses a personal threat, and Combination combines these two methods to elevate the thematic frame to one meeting a public health perspective guideline—addressing the violent crime with context, risk factors and prevention strategies. Based on the preceding literature, it is expected that the Combination condition meeting the public health perspective approach guidelines will have the strongest effect of all three. The four messages used for the experimental stimuli are given in Appendix F.

After viewing the message, all participants took the same post-test survey. The first block of questions asked participants to respond to four questions about their perception of frequency. The first two frequency questions asked how often participants think sexual assault occurs on college campuses and in the U.S. with a 7-point Likert-style scale from never to very frequently. The last two frequency questions asked participants to give an approximate number for how many sexual assaults occur each year, providing population counts for LSU and the U.S. The second block presented randomly ordered Likert-style questions, adapted from Senn & Dzinas's (1996) Fear of Rape Scale. Two questions asked how safe the participant feels going into public restrooms, and in their

apartment/house when they are alone, with a 4-point scale from very unsafe to very safe. The remaining twelve questions in this block were measured on a 4-point scale from never to always, and asked questions like “I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night,” “I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation,” “I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night,” and “How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?” The third block had two questions yes or no items asking “Has a close friend or relative of yours been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)?” and “Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)?” for covariate analysis. The last block contained five final questions. The first three were demographic questions including gender, age and ethnicity. Next, a blank was given with the prompt “Please use this space to write anything else you would like to add. (This question is optional).” Finally, a space to enter an anonymous crediting ID was given for students completing the survey for course credit. The full survey questionnaire is given in Appendix G.

Finally, a debriefing screen reminded participants that the message reporting a rape on campus was only a hypothetical scenario and did not describe actual events. Participants were also informed of the source for the provided statistic used in the experiment, and reminded of the method of contacting the researcher or IRB about the study.

The full experiment was programmed into the survey research program Qualtrics, which randomly assigned participants into one of the four conditions,

and handled administration of the post-test survey. Qualtrics anonymously collected all student responses and the results were analyzed using SPSS.

Covariate. A potential covariate identified for the experiment is whether the participant themselves has experienced sexual assault. The experiment tested whether a person who reads the university announcement with/without contextualizing information will evaluate rape as isolated or common, and if they feel personally at risk of the crime. Findings from Culbertson, Vik and Kooiman, (2001), Skogan & Maxfield (1981, p. 63) and Smith (1988) show that women who have experienced sexual assault are more fearful of crime than women who have not. Since a person who has experienced sexual assault themselves is likely more aware of frequency and personal risk than someone who has not, this had potential to skew responses upward for these participants. Additionally, because this experiment involves perceptions of sexual assault and women are typically affected by this crime more often than men, the participant's gender could be an influencing covariate to the results. These items were addressed as post-test questions so they could be evaluated as potential covariate factors to the results.

4. RESULTS

Study 1

Descriptives. The first element of this research consisted of a total of 23 completed interviews. Among all placed calls, the phone interviews had a 52.27% response rate. The department on campus where emergency communications are written and distributed varied among universities, so the interviews were conducted with various departments. Seven interviews were conducted with an upper level administrator at the police department (Chief of Police, Lieutenant or Captain), five were conducted with a university police department (police officers, staff, administrators, etc), eight were conducted with a university department of public safety or department of campus safety, and three were conducted with a distinct department named the office of emergency management. The average duration of each interview was 5 minutes, 52 seconds in length, with a minimum of 3 minutes, 3 seconds and a maximum of 17 minutes, 28 seconds. Before the list was randomly sorted, all Universities were categorized into the following six geographic regions in the US: Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, New England, South, Southwest and West. Completed interviews were conducted with at least one university from each region, including seven Midwestern schools, seven Southern schools, five Western schools, two Southwestern schools, one Mid-Atlantic school and one New England school.

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that University communication messages about sexual assault are largely unsystematic and the persons who write them largely do not intentionally follow best practices for communicating

about violence. A codebook was created to evaluate the interview responses. Understanding how similarly universities responded to each of the interview questions helped give a clearer picture of the current state of emergency communications among universities. Review of the interview responses created categories of responses for each question, identified overlaps within the data, and allowed for clusters of responses to emerge from the data. Following this initial review, larger categories were created to classify the individual responses based on their attempts to implement best practices.

Interview Responses. For the first question, universities were asked what methods they used to contact students with an emergency alert. Table 4.1 shows the frequencies of their various responses. (Note for these statistics that universities were able to give multiple responses to this question). Nearly all universities reported using mass e-mail to reach students, and all reported that they had a text-alert system in place. Thirteen said that their systems supported an emergency alert phone call, and five said that they use their website, Facebook or Twitter pages to communicate with students. Finally, ten schools in the sample reported having some form of an on-campus alert system, including sirens, radios, outdoor speakers, campus phones and campus televisions where emergency communication messages could be broadcast.

Table 4.1 – University reported methods of contacting students

Method	Email	Text	Phone call	Online / social media	On-campus alert
Mentioned	22	23	13	5	10
Not mentioned	1	0	10	18	13

Next, universities were asked whether their emergency alert systems were opt-in or opt-out—whether students were automatically enrolled in the emergency alerts or if they needed to voluntarily sign up to receive alerts. Nine schools said that all of their emergency systems were opt-in and students had to personally sign up to receive alerts, six schools said that their system automatically enrolled students in their emergency alert messages and students had to opt-out, and eight reported using some combination of opt-in/opt-out depending on the medium (typically opt-in for texting and opt-out for email).

Third, universities were asked what types of incidents would qualify to be considered worthy of an emergency alert message. The most commonly mentioned threats were weather and active shooter. Table 4.2 shows the frequencies for these responses. (Note again for these statistics that universities were able to give multiple responses to this question). Most universities gave weather and active shooter as example scenarios where they would use the emergency notification system, and only two schools mentioned sexual assault or rape. Among the universities who responded with “other” the most common responses were gas line leaks, school closures, fire, lockdown, chemical spill, natural disaster and lost child.

Table 4.2 – University reported threats warranting emergency notification

Method	Weather	Active shooter	Armed robbery	Sexual assault	Other
Mentioned	17	18	10	2	17
Not mentioned	6	5	13	21	6

For question four, universities were asked if the emergency messages were written within the office of the person being interviewed or elsewhere on campus. This revealed whether communication messages were distributed in conjunction with other departments, and also served as an additional check that the proper spokesperson was being interviewed at each university. Ten interviewees said that their department was responsible for writing and distributing the messages, and thirteen said that messages were written by some combination of departments on campus including theirs depending on the situation—i.e. messages were drafted by university police and then "vetted" by university communications, etc.

Question five asked whether the department used a template message when creating the emergency alerts or if they were written as needed. Table 4.3 depicts frequencies for their responses.

Table 4.3 – University reported use of templates for emergency alerts

Response	Frequency
No templates	10
No templates, but some saved / write from example	5
No template, but standard language	1
One/a few templates used for specific types	4
Multiple templates depending on emergency	3

Importantly, ten universities use no template message for any type of emergency alerts. Five reported using a prior example and one reported using standard language for the alerts. Seven schools in total use at least one template,

however the four schools who reported using one or a few designated that they were for emergencies including tornadoes or weather and active shooters, not for Clery crimes or sexual assault. Three universities reported that they have several templates on file that are used depending on the emergency.

Question seven asked for a copy of the template kept on file from the universities who reported using a template to write their emergency alerts. Of the three schools who reported using a template, one assented to the request and two suggested that the researcher access prior messages from their websites.

The final question asked how the emergency alerts are stored after being sent to students—whether the alerts were published online or kept record of internally. Table 4.4 depicts their responses.

Table 4.4 – University reported archival of emergency alerts

Response	Frequency
Kept internally only	7
Published online only	7
Both published online and kept internally	6
Neither published online nor kept internally	3

Seven schools keep record of the alerts internally, but do not publish them online. Seven schools publish the alerts online only and do not keep them on file in their office. Six schools report keeping internal record and publishing the alerts to their website. Finally, three universities reported that they do not keep any record of the messages once they are sent out, either in an online archive or internally as a crime log. This response in particular is troubling, because one requirement of

the Clery Act is for universities to maintain a daily public crime log, yet these messages warranting notification of the entire student body are not kept on file.

Template Messages. The initial research design for this thesis included an analysis of the content of the template messages various universities used to create their timely warning messages; however, the interviews revealed that not many schools use a template for these alerts. Only three universities in the sample responded that they have multiple templates on file for various emergencies. One of these schools assented to the request to provide a copy of their template, and followed through by sending a sample of a previously distributed alert message. The remaining two suggested that the researcher access the previously sent timely warning alerts available on their website, and these messages were collected. In total, three previously distributed timely warning messages that were constructed from a template were available for analysis. Because of the limited number of these templates, a discussion of themes will replace a full content analysis.

The first of these sample timely warnings was collected from university 7, and was a prior report of a sexual assault incident. The second was collected from university 21 and refers to the incident as “sexual intercourse without consent.” The third was a timely warning sent by university 12 about a robbery just outside of the campus area. Each university’s method of detailing their respective incidents is distinct, specifically in the information provided following the description of the incident. First, this research will examine the similarities between the three. All three introduce the alert with an announcement that the

message is being sent in compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Police and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998. All three messages include the date, time and approximate location (building, street, etc.) of the incident. Two of the notices reveal the gender of the victim, and two reveal the gender of the alleged perpetrator. The two notices about a sexual assault both provide information about victim resources on and off campus, and both provide information about obtaining a medical exam to preserve evidence even if a decision regarding how to proceed has not been made. One of the messages about sexual assault and the one reporting robbery both urge students to report suspicious activity, and give a call to action to call the police with any additional information.

The messages differ, however, in overall direction. The message from university 7 reporting a sexual assault opens with information about victim's resources provides the contact number for a support hotline. Next, a statement about the message's purpose in compliance with the Clery Act is given. The description of the incident is two sentences in length and makes no reference to either party involved, calling the incident "a third party report of a sexual assault." The rest of the message then proceeds to follow a public health perspective approach. The first sentence following the description of the event reads, "the only person responsible for sexual misconduct is the perpetrator," followed by a description of the university policy on sexual misconduct and a statement explaining that alcohol and drugs invalidate consent. Statistics are given about sexual victimization during college and then a statement that sexual assault is

most commonly committed by someone known to the victim. The message then offers personal safety strategies, a call to action to call the police, and finally a call to action to seek medical attention and conduct a sexual assault examination.

The message from university 21 opened with a disclosure that the message is in compliance with the Clery Act. Next, a description of the incident follows, reporting an event and saying that the incident occurred two days prior to the report. It describes the alleged perpetrator as “a male, known to (the victim).” Then the message offers information that sexual assault typically occurs between individuals who know each other, and encourages anyone who has experienced sexual assault or knows a friend who has to immediately seek medical attention. Finally, the message gives details about victim resources on and off campus.

The third of these sample timely warning messages came from university 12 and does not involve a sexual assault. Because the incident described is a robbery, the details do not strictly align with the first two; however, the structure is similar enough that a comparison can be made. First, this message opens with the disclosure that the alert was written in compliance with the Clery Act. Next, details of the incident are given and the message states that the crime is still being investigated. The message then gives students a list of personal safety tips, and the message closes by urging students to report suspicious behavior and individuals to the police. Finally, the message is signed by the university’s Chief of Police—this is the only message of the three to end with a signature.

Preparedness Evaluation. Of the full interviews conducted with university public safety and campus police departments, three major categories of

emergency response procedures were identified. These three categories will be referred to as Proper, Insufficient and Improper. Proper indicates that a university reported procedures *consistent with* a public health perspective approach; Insufficient indicates that a university reported procedures *lacking* recommendations made by a public health perspective; Improper indicates that a university reported procedures *contrary to* a public health perspective. Of the universities interviewed for this research, 3 were found to be Proper, 12 were found to be Insufficient, and 8 were found to be Improper. In an effort to efficiently explain the important differences between these methods and the implications behind each approach, this research presents an emblematic example from each of these procedural categories.

As an example of a Proper Timely Warning procedure for campus sexual assault, consider interview responses from University 10. Their on-campus Department of Public Safety is responsible for all emergency alert messages. In the event of an emergency on campus, students are alerted via phone, text and e-mail, and all students are automatically enrolled—i.e. to miss or avoid emergency notifications, a student has to personally opt out of the communications, and therefore the maximum number of receptive students are reached with the alerts. University 10 responded that emergency alerts are sent to their students in the event of potential severe weather, school closings, active shooter situations, burglaries, armed robberies, rape, and also has procedures in place to follow Clery mandated Timely Warning requirements, and anything posing an ongoing threat to students. They responded that they have a set of

separate templates in place that are used depending on the nature of the emergency that they are reporting, and that all messages sent out to students are stored in their emergency notification system and subsequently published online for student access. When asked for a copy of the template on file for sexual assault emergency alerts, the university assented to the request and said, “our department is very transparent about this kind of thing, so if you send us an official e-mail request that’ll be no problem.” This school replied with a sample timely warning message they had previously sent to their students, and this was one of three made available for this research by the contacted universities.

As an example of an Insufficient Timely Warning procedure for campus sexual assault, consider interview responses from University 4. Again, their on-campus Department of Public Safety is responsible for writing and sending the Timely Warning messages to students. Students receive emergency notifications via e-mail, text, or phone, but the emergency alert system enrollment is voluntary—students must sign up for the alerts voluntarily to receive any emergency communication. The university Public Safety office uses software to prepare and distribute the messages to students, and although the software has a place for template messages to be stored for future use the university responded that they do not use the feature at this time. The department also indicated that it does not keep an internal log of the alerts that are sent out over time, but recent emergency notifications are published to their department’s website as crime alert updates and remain available for 30 days.

As an example of an Improper Timely Warning procedure for campus sexual assault, consider interview responses from University 5. The interview here was conducted with the university's Chief of Police, who was forthcoming with details about their response system and eager to answer all questions. For emergency alerts, all students 1) are enrolled by default in an e-mail alert system, 2) have the option to enroll in an emergency text, phone, voicemail, and email service, and 3) are protected by a tornado siren on campus for severe weather announcements. When asked about the types of emergencies that qualify for the emergency alert, the university response is problematic from a public health perspective. First, an assurance was immediately made that the department is sure to follow all of the Clery mandates for Timely Warnings to students. (This seemed like covering bases). Then, the details of the question response indicated that emergency response procedure seemed to be arbitrarily divided based on perceived seriousness of the emergency being reported. Examples were given here that the (text-alert program) would be used for emergency notification of an active shooter on campus, active claims about violence or major threat to campus, etc. because these would be distributed as text and phone alerts; for the case of an armed robbery a student email would be sent because "this is an act where the response would be to make sure everyone knows that this happened but is only an isolated incident," assuring students that no continuing danger exists. This same policy is used for personal attacks and sexual assault, but they added that these are sent less frequently. "We try to avoid using (our text-alert program) unless we have an actual emergency, like

severe weather reports from the county or school cancellations or major threats." Next, they reported that all emergency notifications are sent by the Public Safety office. As an example scenario, the Chief of Police explained, "last September we had an armed robbery that happened at 11:30 at night. As a result, I got out of bed to write it up. It probably takes me about a half an hour to write up the message and get all of the facts and make sure I'm sending correct details, and then I send the message to public relations. We limit access to (our e-mail-alert program) because if we send out anything at all like.. basketball game information.. people will stop reading them. So only PR can send the alerts—I write the message up, send it to them, and then within 20 minutes it is out as an email to our students." To the question asking if a template is in place for these alerts, the department responded that none are used. "When we write these, you only get so many characters for texts, and the point is to make sure everyone has just the facts. We try to keep them short, sweet and to the point. And to make sure everyone knows this is important, but just a one-time thing." Finally, in response to the last question regarding whether the department keeps previously sent alerts internally or publishes them online for students, they replied that the process to sign up for the alerts is available online, as well as their Clery policy and emergency management plan, but no files are kept of prior alerts. During the interview, their Chief of Police was online and noticed for the first time that their department website has a section titled Campus Alerts where warnings should be posted. He said the page was "embarrassing," and currently revealed two existing alerts: one reminds faculty and staff to read a memo distributed with tips

for safety at work dated May 2009, and one reports the arrest of two students in possession of a date rape drug dated October 2008. This interview was the longest of all 23, and besides the discovery of this webpage this respondent was eager to share their department's procedures which he felt were appropriate.

Study 2

This study involved an experimental manipulation of a control condition and three treatment conditions—Treatment A (Statistics), Treatment B (Strategies), and Treatment C (Combination). As detailed above, the control condition showed a standard alert describing the incident and each treatment condition added some form of contextualizing information to this base message. Statistics added campus sexual assault statistics to the original message, Strategies added suggestions of personal safety strategies to the original message, and Combination added both statistics and personal safety strategies.

Descriptives. A total of 193 university undergraduate students participated in this experiment. Of these participants, 164 were female and 29 were male. The average age for participants in the study was 20.1, ranging from 18 to 43 years. Seventy-nine percent of the participants were white, 12% were black or African American, 3% were Asian, nearly 5% selected other, and less than 1% selected Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Tables 4.5 demonstrates experimental balance and relatively equal distribution of the participants in the study among the control and treatment conditions for condition assigned, gender of participant, average age of participant in each condition and ethnicity of participants in each condition.

Table 4.5 – Balance among condition, gender, age and ethnicity

Condition Assigned	N	Gender		Mean Age	White	Black or African American	Asian	Other
		M	F					
Control	48	8	40	20.1	36	8	2	2
Statistics	48	6	42	20.3	37	7	2	2
Strategies	50	12	38	20.2	39	6	1	4
Combination	47	3	44	19.8	41	3	1	2

The preceding balance table shows that given the demographic makeup of the sample, each condition in the experiment was acceptably balanced to proceed with analysis of the results.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 stated that the inclusion of rape statistics and contextualizing information in University communication messages about sexual assault will increase perception of the frequency of rape occurrences. For frequency, the experiment's post-test responses were analyzed using descriptives to compare average means by condition assigned for two questions, and independent samples t-tests to analyze mean differences and significance among two questions (see tables below).

Table 4.6 represents the average responses to "How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs on college campuses?" Treatment groups Statistics and Combination are groups which received a contextualizing statistic and these mean responses are somewhat higher than the other two conditions, but the standard errors for these scores reveals that this difference is too small to

treat as a true difference between groups. The responses center around an average (5), which corresponds with the choice “sometimes” on the scale from never (1) to very frequently (7).

Table 4.6 – How often rape or sexual assault occurs on college campuses

Condition Assigned	N	Mean	Std. Error
Control	48	4.94	.172
Statistics	48	5.13	.173
Strategies	50	4.98	.180
Combination	47	5.11	.173

Table 4.7 represents the average responses to “How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs in the U.S.?” In this case, average responses for each condition are similar to one another with no notable difference between control or any treatment. The average response (6) corresponds with the choice “frequently” on the scale from never (1) to very frequently (7). Although comparing the responses here do not reveal a difference between conditions in perception of overall frequency, something telling from comparing the means is that the average response for this question is approximately 1 point higher than the average response given in Table 4.6 for the frequency on college campuses. This reveals that respondents consider the frequency of sexual assault to be more often in the U.S. overall than on college campuses—for college campuses the average response was “sometimes” and for the U.S. overall the average response was “frequently.”

Table 4.7 – How often rape or sexual assault occurs in the U.S.

Condition Assigned	N	Mean	Std. Error
Control	48	6.04	.126
Statistics	48	5.98	.156
Strategies	50	6.00	.137
Combination	47	6.19	.128

Table 4.8 represents the average responses to “Approximately how many rapes occur each year on a campus the size of LSU (a population of about 30,000 students)?” LSU was used because all participants were undergraduate students at this university, and a population estimate was given for reference because the question asks for a number of occurrences. As mentioned earlier, RAINN estimates “as many as 350 rapes per 10,000 students" occur annually on college campuses (Campus Safety, n.d.). Because the population estimate was provided of 30,000 students, a response of 1,050 victimizations would represent an accurate estimate. Here, the data was recoded to give values 1,050 or higher as 1 and values 1,049 or below as 0 to give a count of the number of students estimating at or above the appropriate understanding of frequency. This is presented beside the mean response given by participants in each condition. Table 4.8 shows that although the mean response is slightly higher for Statistics and Combination (treatment conditions where a statistic is provided in the text), these mean responses are still significantly below an accurate estimate, even for the highest mean. Also, the number of participants who responded at or above an accurate estimate of 1,050 shows no real difference between conditions.

Table 4.8 – Estimate of annual occurrences for LSU-sized campus by condition

Condition Assigned	N	Accurate Estimate or Higher	Mean Response
Control	48	2	285.79
Statistics	48	3	437.40
Strategies	50	2	254.22
Combination	47	5	392.68

Table 4.9 represents the average responses to “Approximately how many rapes occur each year in the United States (a population of about 319,000,000 people)?” As with the previous question, a population estimate was given for reference because the question asks for a number of occurrences. Tjaden and Thoennes’s (1997) study of the prevalence of sexual violence estimated that 302,091 victimizations occur annually in the U.S. Here, the data was recoded to label values 302,091 or higher as 1 and values 302,090 or below as 0 to give a count of the number of students estimating at or above the appropriate understanding of frequency. Table 4.9 shows the mean and standard errors for responses within each condition. The mean differences vary widely between conditions and the treatment conditions each have substantively larger means than the control; however, the standard errors reveal that despite these differences they cannot be trusted with any degree of certainty to be representative. Because the standard errors in some cases are nearly the same size as the estimates given, it shows that these responses can be treated essentially as unrevealing guesses. Additionally, although the number of participants who responded at or above 302,091 is slightly higher for the

treatment conditions over Control, no real difference exists between conditions for this either.

Table 4.9 – Estimate of annual occurrences in U.S. by condition

Condition Assigned	N	Accurate Estimate or Higher	Mean Response	Std. Error
Control	48	3	82,422.31	46,991.06
Statistics	48	7	4,653,420.15	4,164,997.39
Strategies	50	6	20,163,601.88	19,996,927.26
Combination	47	5	563,583.04	322,475.95

In all cases for frequency, the differences noted are not statistically significant by an acceptable margin. From these tests, it cannot be concluded with any certainty that the experimental manipulation had an effect on perception of frequency of rape occurrences. Thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 stated that the inclusion of rape statistics and contextualizing information in University communication messages about sexual assault will increase personal estimation of threat with regard to rape, and will increase reported preventative behaviors. For threat perception, the experiment's post-test responses were analyzed for the 14 items adapted from Senn & Dzinas's (1996) Fear of Rape Scale. The items were analyzed first by using an independent samples t-test to analyze mean differences between the control group and any treatment group (pooled). Then a one-way ANOVA test was created to consider differences in the effects of each treatment condition without the control condition included. Finally, three independent samples t-tests were

used to compare the control group average responses with those from each treatment group independently. These results are depicted in the tables below.

First, an analysis was performed comparing the average mean responses from respondents assigned to the Control condition to the average mean responses from respondents assigned to any of the three treatment conditions. (Note that here, and in all future tables, the significance figure is double-underlined for items meeting the traditional threshold for statistical significance. Items are single-underlined which reach suggestive marginal significance). Table 4.10 represents average responses to the 14 Fear of Rape Scale items.

Table 4.10 – Threat Perception responses t-test, control vs. any treatment

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Control	48	2.92	.102	.457
	Any Treatment	145	2.83	.054	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Control	48	3.10	.091	.745
	Any Treatment	145	3.14	.054	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Control	48	3.31	.123	.233
	Any Treatment	145	3.48	.067	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Control	48	2.92	.136	.155
	Any Treatment	145	3.12	.070	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Control	48	2.71	.155	.010
	Any Treatment	145	3.14	.082	

(Table 4.10 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Control	48	2.00	.130	.006
	Any Treatment	145	2.43	.079	
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Control	48	2.83	.120	.024
	Any Treatment	145	3.15	.070	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Control	48	2.25	.144	.789
	Any Treatment	145	2.21	.079	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Control	48	2.71	.143	.061
	Any Treatment	145	3.01	.078	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Control	48	2.90	.131	.129
	Any Treatment	145	3.12	.072	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Control	48	3.04	.146	.510
	Any Treatment	145	3.14	.076	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Control	48	3.67	.081	.568
	Any Treatment	145	3.72	.051	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement	Control	48	2.35	.128	.239
	Any Treatment	145	2.54	.079	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Control	48	2.52	.133	.256
	Any Treatment	145	2.68	.069	

The preceding table shows that three items present a statistically significant difference of means, and several items were marginally significant. This indicates that a significant difference exists between the Control condition responses and the responses of participants exposed to one of the treatment conditions for items in the Fear of Rape Scale. This reveals that there is a statistically significant difference between participants who are given a thematic framed message with some form of the manipulated contextualizing information and those who are given only a standard episodic message.

Next, a one-way ANOVA test, depicted in Table 4.11, compared the average means of the three treatment conditions (Statistics, Strategies, Combination) against each other without the Control condition present.

Table 4.11 – Threat Perception ANOVA, differences between treatments

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Statistics	48	2.79	.089	.854
	Strategies	50	2.86	.090	
	Combination	47	2.85	.101	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Statistics	48	3.17	.100	.866
	Strategies	50	3.10	.100	
	Combination	47	3.15	.076	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Statistics	48	3.42	.115	.095
	Strategies	50	3.34	.139	
	Combination	47	3.68	.081	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Statistics	48	2.94	.128	.161
	Strategies	50	3.18	.124	
	Combination	47	3.26	.112	

(Table 4.11 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Statistics	48	2.92	.148	.017
	Strategies	50	3.06	.144	
	Combination	47	3.47	.121	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Statistics	48	2.48	.146	.791
	Strategies	50	2.36	.136	
	Combination	47	2.47	.129	
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Statistics	48	3.02	.131	.109
	Strategies	50	3.08	.121	
	Combination	47	3.36	.107	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Statistics	48	2.29	.152	.748
	Strategies	50	2.18	.139	
	Combination	47	2.15	.122	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Statistics	48	2.94	.138	.257
	Strategies	50	2.90	.144	
	Combination	47	3.19	.120	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Statistics	48	3.06	.138	.133
	Strategies	50	2.98	.119	
	Combination	47	3.32	.110	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Statistics	48	3.13	.135	.699
	Strategies	50	3.08	.127	
	Combination	47	3.23	.133	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Statistics	48	3.73	.077	.135
	Strategies	50	3.60	.118	
	Combination	47	3.85	.052	

(Table 4.11 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Statistics	48	2.42	.122	.253
	Strategies	50	2.48	.154	
	Combination	47	2.72	.128	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Statistics	48	2.71	.119	.530
	Strategies	50	2.58	.134	
	Combination	47	2.77	.102	

The preceding table shows that when considering the Fear of Rape Scale items in the experiment, only one item presents a significant difference between treatment conditions, yet several with marginal significance. This could be interpreted to mean that there is little difference between the addition of contextualizing information in one form or another—that the addition of statistics or personal safety strategies or both have similar influence on threat perception. However, because several of the significance figures are suggestive (values between 75% and 95% confidence level), this indicates that there is some effect made by the different types of context added, but it lies outside of the conventional threshold for statistical significance. Therefore, this ANOVA reveals that the difference between the various treatments is not strongly significant, but differences are present and in several cases are marginally significant. Given that Table 4.10 indicated a difference exists between the average effects of participants in the treatment conditions and the effects of those in the control condition, and given that Table 4.11 indicated that noteworthy differences exist between the treatment conditions for several preventative behavior responses

including “I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night” and “I think twice before going out for a walk late at night,” next the average effects of each treatment condition were evaluated independently against the control condition to see which treatment condition had the greatest overall influence.

Table 4.12 represents the mean differences between the control condition and Statistics for the 14 items in the Fear of Rape Scale.

Table 4.12 – Threat Perception responses t-test, control vs. Statistics

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Control	48	2.92	.102	.360
	Statistics	48	2.79	.089	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Control	48	3.10	.091	.645
	Statistics	48	3.17	.100	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Control	48	3.31	.123	.538
	Statistics	48	3.42	.115	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Control	48	2.92	.136	.911
	Statistics	48	2.94	.128	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Control	48	2.71	.155	.333
	Statistics	48	2.92	.148	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Control	48	2.00	.130	.016
	Statistics	48	2.48	.146	

(Table 4.12 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Control	48	2.83	.120	.295
	Statistics	48	3.02	.131	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Control	48	2.25	.144	.843
	Statistics	48	2.29	.152	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Control	48	2.71	.143	.251
	Statistics	48	2.94	.138	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Control	48	2.90	.131	.382
	Statistics	48	3.06	.138	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Control	48	3.04	.146	.676
	Statistics	48	3.13	.135	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Control	48	3.67	.081	.577
	Statistics	48	3.73	.077	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Control	48	2.35	.128	.725
	Statistics	48	2.42	.122	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Control	48	2.52	.133	.296
	Statistics	48	2.71	.119	

The preceding table shows that when comparing responses from the Control condition with responses from Statistics, only one item from the Fear of Rape scale reached statistical significance. This indicates that the average effect of Statistics is not significantly different from the average effect of the control.

Table 4.13 represents the mean differences between the control condition and Strategies for the 14 items in the Fear of Rape Scale.

Table 4.13 – Threat Perception responses t-test, control vs. Strategies

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Control	48	2.92	.102	.679
	Strategies	50	2.86	.090	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Control	48	3.10	.091	.975
	Strategies	50	3.10	.100	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Control	48	3.31	.123	.883
	Strategies	50	3.34	.139	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Control	48	2.92	.136	.154
	Strategies	50	3.18	.124	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Control	48	2.71	.155	.099
	Strategies	50	3.06	.144	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Control	48	2.00	.130	.059
	Strategies	50	2.36	.136	

(Table 4.13 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Control	48	2.83	.120	.151
	Strategies	50	3.08	.121	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Control	48	2.25	.144	.728
	Strategies	50	2.18	.139	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Control	48	2.71	.143	.346
	Strategies	50	2.90	.144	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Control	48	2.90	.131	.635
	Strategies	50	2.98	.119	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Control	48	3.04	.146	.843
	Strategies	50	3.08	.127	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Control	48	3.67	.081	.644
	Strategies	50	3.60	.118	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Control	48	2.35	.128	.534
	Strategies	50	2.48	.154	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Control	48	2.52	.133	.755
	Strategies	50	2.58	.134	

The preceding table shows that when comparing responses from the Control condition with responses from Strategies, the difference for only one item from the Fear of Rape scale is marginally significant. Three others have suggestive significance levels.

Finally, Table 4.14 represents the mean differences between the control condition and Combination for the 14 items in the Fear of Rape Scale.

Table 4.14 – Threat Perception responses t-test, control vs. Combination

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Control	48	2.92	.102	.649
	Combination	47	2.85	.101	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Control	48	3.10	.091	.687
	Combination	47	3.15	.076	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Control	48	3.31	.123	.015
	Combination	47	3.68	.081	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Control	48	2.92	.136	.058
	Combination	47	3.26	.112	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Control	48	2.71	.155	.000
	Combination	47	3.47	.121	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Control	48	2.00	.130	.012
	Combination	47	2.47	.129	

(Table 4.14 continued)

	Condition	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Control	48	2.83	.120	.001
	Combination	47	3.36	.107	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Control	48	2.25	.144	.594
	Combination	47	2.15	.122	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Control	48	2.71	.143	.011
	Combination	47	3.19	.120	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Control	48	2.90	.131	.015
	Combination	47	3.32	.110	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Control	48	3.04	.146	.333
	Combination	47	3.23	.133	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Control	48	3.67	.081	.059
	Combination	47	3.85	.052	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Control	48	2.35	.128	.044
	Combination	47	2.72	.128	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Control	48	2.52	.133	.148
	Combination	47	2.77	.102	

The preceding table shows that when comparing mean responses from the control condition with responses from Combination, the majority of the items from the Fear of Rape scale are statistically significant. Seven items are statistically significant, and two more are marginally significant (p=.058 and p=.059).

The preceding three tables (Table 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14) each showed the results of independent t-tests comparing the mean responses to the Fear of Rape Scale between one of the three treatment conditions and the control. Statistics and Strategies both added contextualizing information to the base informative message to create a thematic frame. Results for these show that several items were suggestive of significance for Statistics and Strategies when compared to the control, but the results did not show many which were statistically significant at a $p<.05$ level. However, Combination, which incorporated both types of contextualizing information from Statistics and Strategies in its thematic frame, was statistically significant regarding the majority of items on the Fear of Rape scale used to measure a person's perception of personal threat and reported preventative behaviors.

The following items showed a statistically significant reported increase for participants who viewed the thematic frame of Combination (contextualizing statistics and personal safety strategy recommendations). The items are listed by level of significance in ascending order:

- I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night. p=.000
- When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me. p=.001

- I am afraid of being sexually assaulted. p=.011
- I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation. p=.012
- If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted. p=.015
- I think twice before going out for a walk late at night. p=.015
- The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement. p=.044
- I avoid going out alone at night. p=.058
- When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious. p=.059

From these results, it can be concluded that the experimental manipulation of Combination had a strong effect on threat perception of rape occurrences, and on reported preventative behaviors. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Covariate. Two factors were analyzed for covariate influence on the data: if the respondent said they had ever been personally victimized by sexual violence (including rape or sexual assault) or knew a close friend or relative who was, and the gender of the respondents. First, effects among people with close proximity to victimization were analyzed.

Table 4.15 shows the frequencies for how participants responded to the two covariate questions. Twenty-six participants (23 females and 3 males) responded that they personally had experienced sexual violence, comprising 13.5% of respondents. Sixty-nine participants (57 females and 12 males) responded that they knew a close friend or relative who had experienced sexual violence, comprising over 1/3 of respondents (35.8%).

Table 4.15 – Covariate victimization responses

	Response	Frequency	Percent
Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)?	Yes	26	13.5
	No	167	86.5
Has a close friend or relative of yours been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)?	Yes	69	35.8
	No	124	64.2

Next, an independent samples t-test analyzed the mean differences for the questions about frequency to determine if a difference existed between those who had personally experienced sexual violence and those who had not. Table 4.16 shows that the covariate factor of personal victimization did not have a significant influence on the participant results for frequency. No item had a statistically significant difference between participants in each of the respondent groups, and results of each item align with the results reported of the overall mean responses when considering all participants. In other words, when responses from those participants who said they had personally been sexually assaulted are removed, the overall pattern of the responses remains the same as when they were included in the analysis. The trends and results analyzed above for perception of frequency of occurrences do not change even when those participants who reported experiencing sexual violence personally are removed and considered separately, so it was determined to not be an influencing covariate variable.

Table 4.16 – Frequency responses t-test, by personal victimization

	Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence?	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs on college campuses?	Yes	26	4.96	.245	.735
	No	167	5.05	.093	
How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs in the U.S.?	Yes	26	6.19	.176	.419
	No	167	6.03	.074	
Approximately how many rapes occur each year on a campus the size of LSU (a population of about 30,000)	Yes	26	354.35	91.975	.884
	No	167	339.32	37.833	
Approximately how many rapes occur each year in the United States (a population of about 319,000,000)	Yes	26	78,831.12	53,191.107	.630
	No	167	7,544,546.86	6,098,237.24	

Finally, an independent samples t-test analyzed the mean differences for the questions on threat perception. Table 4.17 shows that the covariate factor of personal victimization did not have a significant influence on the participant results for threat perception. As with the frequency items, no question here had a statistically significant difference between respondent groups, only three had marginal significance, and results of each align with the results reported of the overall mean responses when considering all participants.

Table 4.17 – Threat Perception responses t-test, by personal victimization

	Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence?	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Yes	26	2.77	.160	.479
	No	167	2.87	.049	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Yes	26	3.24	.119	.358
	No	167	3.11	.050	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Yes	26	3.65	.095	.145
	No	167	3.40	.066	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Yes	26	3.27	.131	.219
	No	167	3.04	.070	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Yes	26	3.00	.200	.846
	No	167	3.04	.079	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Yes	26	2.35	.200	.910
	No	167	2.32	.073	
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Yes	26	3.00	.136	.641
	No	167	3.08	.068	

(Table 4.17 continued)

	Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence?	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Yes	26	2.19	.157	.886
	No	167	2.22	.077	
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Yes	26	3.15	.213	.206
	No	167	2.90	.072	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Yes	26	3.12	.178	.740
	No	167	3.05	.068	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Yes	26	3.12	.217	.982
	No	167	3.12	.070	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Yes	26	3.77	.101	.590
	No	167	3.70	.048	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Yes	26	2.46	.186	.858
	No	167	2.50	.073	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Yes	26	2.65	.166	.942
	No	167	2.64	.066	

Broadly, the trends and results analyzed above for both perception of frequency and threat perception do not change even when those participants

who reported experiencing sexual violence personally are removed and considered separately. This lead to the conclusion that the potential covariate factor of personal victimization did not have a significant effect on the results.

Second, gender of the respondents was considered. Because this experiment involves sexual assault and women are typically affected by this crime more often than men, measures for threat perception or frequency could be affected by gender. The same two types of analyses were performed as were performed for personal victimization—two independent samples t-tests analyzing the differences of means for frequency and threat perception. Table 4.18 depicts the frequency items and Table 4.19 depicts the threat perception items.

Table 4.18 – Frequency responses t-test, by gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs on college campuses?	Male	29	4.90	.188	.500
	Female	164	5.06	.097	
How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs in the U.S.?	Male	29	5.86	.170	.245
	Female	164	6.09	.075	
Approximately how many rapes occur each year on a campus the size of LSU (a population of about 30,000)	Male	29	167.34	44.34	.036
	Female	164	372.12	39.90	
Approximately how many rapes occur each year in the United States (a population of about 319,000,000)	Male	29	33,665.31	19,806.89	.606
	Female	164	7,689,101.5	6,209,564	

Table 4.19 – Threat Perception responses t-test, by gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?	Male	29	3.24	.128	.001
	Female	164	2.79	.050	
How safe do you feel in your apartment / house when you are by yourself?	Male	29	3.52	.107	.000
	Female	164	3.06	.049	
I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.	Male	29	2.45	.220	.000
	Female	164	3.61	.046	
I avoid going out alone at night.	Male	29	2.21	.167	.000
	Female	164	3.23	.061	
I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.	Male	29	1.69	.180	.000
	Female	164	3.27	.065	
I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.	Male	29	1.83	.172	.002
	Female	164	2.41	.073	
When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.	Male	29	2.59	.189	.001
	Female	164	3.16	.062	
I feel confident walking alone late at night.	Male	29	3.31	.132	.000
	Female	164	2.02	.068	

(Table 4.19 continued)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.	Male	29	1.69	.132	.000
	Female	164	3.15	.064	
If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.	Male	29	2.03	.168	.000
	Female	164	3.24	.057	
I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.	Male	29	2.66	.223	.004
	Female	164	3.20	.067	
When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.	Male	29	3.07	.178	.000
	Female	164	3.82	.033	
The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.	Male	29	1.79	.160	.000
	Female	164	2.62	.070	
How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?	Male	29	1.59	.127	.000
	Female	164	2.83	.058	

The preceding tables show that gender of the participant had a significant influence on responses to many of the post-test measures as a covariate. Table 4.18 compared the responses between males and females to frequency items from the study. For the first two questions, the same results noticed above are true—while a small difference exists between the mean responses of males and

females, these results are not significant and do not reveal an important difference between the two groups. Additionally, the same pattern noticed from Table 4.6 and 4.7 is true here, that for college campuses the average response was (5) “sometimes” and for the U.S. overall the average response was (6) “frequently.” For the third frequency question, a statistically significant difference is noted. The mean responses for males to the question “Approximately how many rapes occur each year on a campus the size of LSU (a population of about 30,000 students)?” is lower than the mean responses that females gave at a $p<.05$ level. However, the caveat to this finding is the same which limits the difference for the fourth question—the standard errors for these averages vary widely, so the differences shown could be affected by other variables.

Next, an analysis of threat perception responses was performed and broken down by gender of the participant. Table 4.19 shows the results of this analysis, and reveals the impact gender has on the mean responses. The mean difference between males and females was statistically significant for every item in the Fear of Rape Scale to at least a $p<.01$ level, with most significant at a $p<.001$ level. Male respondents reported feeling safer in public washrooms and when home alone, experienced lower levels of personal threat perception, and reported engaging in fewer preventative behaviors than female respondents.

To understand the true impact of these significant factors, it is important to note that the sample population is 85% female, as only 29 of 193 participants were male. Although the covariate analyses show that the mean responses for males have a statistically significant difference from the responses for females,

the pattern of these results is the same as the original analysis because females make up the majority of the sample population. After analyzing the results among males and females, although running the analysis to include only females caused the responses to become a little more significant the overall patterns stay the same. Therefore, the covariate of gender was revealed as an important factor to consider for future research and for drawing larger sample populations where males comprise a larger portion of the participant pool, but does not have a large enough impact on the results to mandate the exclusion of male responses.

Additionally, it is important to note that the analysis performed for the two covariates mentioned (personal victimization and gender) are conducted on observed data. These represent categories of responses of reported information collected from all participants, not information reliant on or directly influencing the condition assignment, or derived from the dynamics of the experimental test. Therefore, the factors explored here can be considered likely explanations for the differences noticed because the groups are otherwise the same, but the results cannot clearly suggest that the covariate factor used to separate the groups is itself a causal mechanism.

Open-ended. Finally, a question offering a blank text box was included following the substantive portion of the survey and the demographic questions. The prompt for the blank said, “Please use this space to write anything else you would like to add. (This question is optional).” Seventeen participants wrote something in the space provided, and examples of their responses are categorized below:

- Account of personal victimization
    - “I was recently raped by my boyfriend. After talking with multiple friends about it, I realized most had similar experiences. Rape is very common, but not often talked about.”
    - “The person who raped me was my boyfriend of over 1 year. He was tired of me saying "no", or "I'm not ready".”
    - “My uncle sexually assaulted both me and my sster(sic), and my mother was often raped by her father. She is insensitive to the matter and feels that it is just something that happens and girls should get over it”
- Study was informative/provoking
    - “I was unaware of how often rape/sexual assault cases occur.”
    - “I would definitely like to learn more about how to prevent this issue from happening.”
    - “I think this is a great way to engage the way LSU student perceive rape culture on campus”
- Discussion of rape severity, issues
    - “Rape should be taken care of way more than it is, and should be looked into and have ways to maybe fix the issue on college campuses.”
    - “Although I do not always take extra precautions, I am aware of the danger of going out alone. It is difficult to always have someone with me, but, on a college campus, the dangers are there.”

    - “I believe people don't think this could happen to them until it happens to them or someone close to them”
    - “I think that many cases of sexual assault do in fact occur on campus each year, but they are not reported. I think females need to be educated on what rape and sexual assault entails. Being blackout drunk and engaging in intercourse when the male is cohernt(sic) is defined as rape and many girls do not realize that.”
- Reasons why I am not afraid
    - “I don't fear rape as a woman, because I look too much like a guy at first glance.”
    - “I have been taking self-defense classes in jiu jitsu for almost 3 years now so walking by myself at night I'm cautious but not scared to do it by myself. I know how to defend myself from most incidences. You should also be asking if any participants have been taking self-defense courses to prepare themselves for bad situations.”
- Commentary
    - “People need to be aware of situations that they put themselves in. Of course, it is not a victims fault if sexual assault occurs. Education and awareness of dangerous situations is the best way to prevent these situations.”
    - “It is more the fact that I don't usually have to walk far to my at night but I am always scared at night of what could happen. If I have to

> walk a long distance on campus at night, I never do unless with 3 or more people. Sometimes I get scared even during the day if I see someone that looks sketchy I get paranoid that something will happen."

Four respondents (3 female and 1 male) who elected to include something in the blank space reported that they personally had experienced sexual violence. The three female respondents were the same three participants above who gave an account of their personal victimization. The male respondent who identified that he had personally been sexually assaulted wrote in the blank "I was unaware of how often rape/sexual assault cases occur." While these cases are nowhere near frequent enough in number to be representative of any generalizable findings, it is gratifying for this study to have served the additional purpose of allowing these survivors an opportunity to relate their story, and access the broader context that comes from a public health perspective's thematic frame.

5. DISCUSSION

The university Chief of Police who candidly revealed that they woke up to write an emergency alert is a reminder that emergencies happen unexpectedly—in the middle of the night when communications personnel are asleep, during school holidays when staff are away, during school football games when the entire university police staff is occupied. Even with all hands on deck, there is often not enough time to vet the language of an emergency message while a crisis is in progress due to the need to alert students quickly. This can lead to a rushed account of the facts of the situation being reported without any broader context being given for the situation. Universities who reported using a template message for specific crises like active shooters on campus explained that the logic behind having a template in place is to save time during the event and ensure that all important information is included. One university said, “For instance, I have an active shooter example saved because I wouldn't want to waste time making that up and typing it if we had a situation like that.” Another university responded that “every moment counts in a tornado,” so this is an example of a “canned message” that they keep on file. This same logic is unfortunately not also applied to other types of university crises which warrant timely warning alerts, including reports of rape or sexual assault incidents. Best practice recommendations for crisis situations typically include a preparedness plan for considering emergencies before they happen, and the majority of universities interviewed do not have template messages in place that guide the writing of emergency alerts while the crisis is happening. Taking the time during

the emergency to write an alert from scratch leaves the communication vulnerable to inappropriate language choices and unnecessary delay.

This research identified three categories of university preparedness for reporting a sexual assault incident to the campus student body: Proper, Insufficient, and Improper. As described in the previous section, Proper indicates that a university reported procedures consistent with a public health perspective approach; Insufficient indicates that a university reported procedures lacking recommendations made by a public health perspective; and Improper indicates that a university reported procedures contrary to a public health perspective.

The public health perspective recommends intentionally framing the reporting of violence in a way that includes context, risk factors and prevention strategies. These elements lead to a broader understanding of crime as a societal problem rather than as isolated, unpreventable incidents, and violence reporting is encouraged to facilitate this understanding because violence is considered an epidemic problem. Universities whose interviews indicate that their timely warning procedures categorized them as Proper are ones which meet this definition and further a public health perspective of violence. University 10, as described, demonstrated its transparency about campus crime, indicated that reports are sent to all students by default, have template messages in place to assure important notices are included in each alert, and keep a record available online and internally of their prior campus alerts to students. These qualities satisfy a public health perspective approach because it indicates that the university considers crime and violence to be an ongoing threat to the security of

their campus and is taking measures to both protect and inform students. Making past alerts available to students indicates both transparency and a commitment to furthering an understanding that crimes happening on campus are broader problems rather than isolated incidents. Additionally, having a template message in place for emergency communication indicates a commitment to consistently communicating.

An ideal system would standardize communication about violence, and strategies of the “Proper” category would be applied across universities. Looking at university 4 and other interviews where the procedures were classified as Insufficient show that there is still a way to go in progressing toward this goal. University 4 offers multiple forms of emergency alert messaging (email, text and phone call), but their alerts are only sent to students who voluntarily enroll, and although they recognize that template messaging can be used to facilitate consistent messaging for emergency situations this feature is not used. Students unaware of the emergency alert system or the enrollment process do not receive the emergency alerts, and because their alerts are written as needed there is no carefully consistent language given to violent acts like sexual assault or rape, and public health information is less likely to be included. Additionally, although they publish their alerts online for students after the fact, they are eventually removed when deemed no longer a threat to campus and no internal log is kept, so the university likely does not think of or treat crime on their campus as a broad problem.

Finally, a look at the problematic aspects of the Improper category of university responses. Taking the example of university 5 at hand, several immediate issues become apparent when discussed through a public health perspective lens. First, though it is usually a consistency benefit that all communications are written through one office, because this interview candidly reported waking up to compose an emergency alert from scratch about armed robbery—while appropriate regarding urgency to warn students—it is clear that nothing is included apart from assuring factually correct details of the incident. This is clear both from this transparency as well as from the response that no templates are used with the intention of keeping the communication “short, sweet and to the point.” Additionally, attention needs to be paid to the problematic nature of online reporting of incidents--the extremely dated incident reports from the campus police website give an impression to students that the police department does not keep up with crime, and the fact that no recent crimes are visible if a student is not enrolled in the alert system leaves students vulnerable and illustrates a failure in emergency communication. Finally, it is important to notice that the university’s Chief of Police eagerly answered these questions with full confidence—the response by this university is one that not only mishandles emergency communication, but also has no idea that this is the case. Confident responses of how crimes like armed robbery are treated to assure students that this is only an isolated incident and communicated about differently than “actual emergencies” is troubling. This treatment is labeled as Improper because many aspects are problematic from a public health perspective, but perhaps the largest

issue is this which makes it clear that violent crimes are considered episodic, isolated events.

These three categories offer a guide by which universities may judge their preparedness to respond to sexual assault crises respecting a public health perspective. If a university adopts a public health perspective approach, considering these aspects of reaching students with appropriate context could help in developing their response program. Additionally, evaluating the areas needing improvement at other universities can give a better understanding of why a public health perspective approach is most appropriate for communicating about violence. One university contacted gave the following response when asked about the types of emergencies addressed with emergency alerts:

> Interviewer: So, what type of emergencies would qualify for you to send out an emergency alert?
> University: Well… what do *you* think?
> Interviewer: A lot of universities handle their emergency alerts differently, so that's why I'm calling—to ask what sort of alerts your school prepares for. Could you give me an example?
> University: Well, we cover everything from gas line leaks… to, you know, emergencies.

While many universities were transparent with their procedures, a few gave intentionally short responses similar to the above example when they were interviewed. The first step for many schools will be improving transparency—communicating about the issue on their campuses and admitting that rape and sexual assault is an existing, ongoing issue. For others, this step is covered and they are ready to consider the language used in their alerts and its implications on student perceptions. Standardizing the language used and creating templates

to ensure that they consistently give context would help universities communicate effectively about violence from a public health perspective approach.

Based on the completed phone calls made and subsequent analyses, it was the finding of this research that the majority of universities contacted are not prepared with a timely warning template message for sexual assault, and their procedures for emergency alert communications are not systematized. Universities who supplied sample messages that were written using their template for timely warnings tended to align with a public health perspective approach, but these results are not representative of a typical university process. These cases mentioned were the only cases of all conducted interviews which reported using any template for timely warnings, and the majority of universities stated that they used no templates at all, with some who wrote with an example but no vetted best practices language. Timely warnings are only required by the Clery Act for instances where the university deems that an ongoing threat exists, and this description often allows universities to exclude acquaintance rapes because the identity of the perpetrator is known. The exclusion of the most common type of sexual assault committed already contributes to an episodic understanding of this crime—at the very least, the alerts that are sent should be structured to present a thematic frame and promote accurate understandings. Timely warning messages are written “as needed” at the majority of universities, which indicates that communication is largely unstructured for reporting emergencies to the campus community. Based on all of this, it is also the finding of this research that the majority of universities do not follow best practices for

communication about violence, and this research recommends that universities create multiple emergency alert templates for use during various emergencies.

The second study of this research explored student perceptions with an experimental test. It was expected that contextualizing information would increase reported perceptions of frequency of rape occurrences, however none of the mean differences were statistically significant between responses of the control group and participants in any of the treatment groups. When considering responses to threat perception, the responses differ from the control as expected. The strength of the differences and types of items influenced improved for each condition, finding the greatest influence from the Combination treatment. Interestingly, even though participants presented with statistics of how common sexual assault is on college campuses did not report accurate numbers for frequency measures, there is still an impact on personal threat perception. Even though reported numbers of incidents or reported levels for how often sexual assault happens do not increase, reported preventative behaviors do increase between conditions. This essentially indicates that participants failed the math test, but passed the life lesson. Being presented with statistics in their treatment condition did not influence the mean responses for how common sexual assault is, but it influenced the levels that those groups reported feeling personally fearful of sexual assault and taking preventative measures because of these attitudes.

This may seem counterintuitive at first--if people do not report that they believe sexual assault to be more common than others who see standard messages with no context, they should not then report that they feel more at risk

than others do. However, this conclusion aligns with a supported notion in political science and public opinion. Human resources departments mandate employee training for how to properly handle hazardous materials, even for employees who might never encounter hazardous materials, because retaining the information is not the point of the exercise—it is learning safety techniques. Employees generally can't recite the purposes of the red/green/black hazmat buckets weeks after their training, yet when they encounter hazardous materials they behave cautiously and look for guidance, and accidents are avoided. The same principle applies to many topics where there is a disconnect between perceived knowledge of a subject and procedural knowledge, or between feeling a threat and the ability to report the source or knowledge that caused that feeling. Generally people can't recall statistics about heart disease or lung cancer, but they feel threat from greasy cheeseburgers and smoking cigarettes. People who go through training about the importance of saving for retirement and contributing to their 401k don't remember anything they learn, but participation rates go up because they learn they should do it for reasons that they can't articulate. They understand the threats and modify their behavior to accommodate them, but can't explain the source of that feeling.

Overall, it is this researcher's opinion that as is the case of training with hazardous materials, it is nearly inconsequential if students reading messages about sexual assault can later relate the statistics on paper. In the case of sexual violence on college campuses, awareness of how common of an issue it is seems less important than students behaving in ways consistent with accurate

understandings of violence as a societal issue. Reports with a thematic frame and from a public health perspective intend to correct the conversation surrounding sexual assault—incidents of rape are not isolated occurrences, and sexual violence is a larger issue with a broader context and influence on society. If students understand violence as an issue that affects more than the victims, and respond by changing attitudes and behaviors related to prevention and a personal understanding of its ongoing risk, that is more valuable and promising than simply reports of correct statistics of how many people are affected. It is more important that fewer people be affected because of changes to behavior, than it is that everyone understand how many are affected.

Three threat perception items which achieved important significance for Combination are worth particular attention: “I am afraid of being sexually assaulted” ($p<.05$), “The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement” ($p<.05$), and “How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?” ($p<.149$). The differences noted are especially important because these three items are the ones which most directly address sexual assault, the threat of rape, and adjusting behaviors in response to the threat of sexual assault. Participants in the Combination group who saw the public health framed message responded significantly differently than those who saw a standard message—not just for reported risk-avoidant behaviors generally, but for responses to items directly asking about fear of rape. Because rape is made so explicit by these scale items, it is clear that providing context in timely warning messages has an effect on the perception of rape and sexual assault specifically. This indicates that supplying

contextualizing information in reports of sexual violence to a campus community can influence the degree to which students feel personally at risk for the crime, and their perceptions of personal safety. The differences noted, particularly for the Combination condition which aligns with a public health perspective, suggest that adding contextualizing information can increase reported levels of threat perception and preventative behaviors over groups who would only otherwise see a standard episodic framed emergency alert.

These findings have substantial public policy implications. There is widespread agreement that this problem is negatively affecting universities and their students, and this research is evidence that a very simple step can have a significant impact. Universities currently have an institution-level problem with communication about sexual assault and rape—University emergency communication processes are un-systematized, and most universities do not follow best practice guidelines for communicating about violence from a public health perspective by implementing template messages and addressing sexual violence as an ongoing threat to their campuses. By following a public health perspective approach, universities could make a concrete and easy difference in perceptions with very little effort and zero additional cost. This research is evidence that simply systematizing the language and giving structure to the content of timely warning messages can make a big change in student perceptions of personal threat and in their reported preventative behaviors. The transition is simple, painless, and doesn't require more money or effort—universities just have to prepare for emergency alert communication about sexual

assault by creating template messages using a public health perspective approach. This research found that a thematically framed template giving a combination of statistics and personal safety strategies can have a profound effect on perceptions.

Remembering that there is a normative agreement between all parties involved and a mutually desired outcome (an informed society), and considering the ease with which these changes can be implemented, the adoption of this strategy should be an easy decision. Including contextualizing information in campus reports of sexual violence will lead to more accurate understandings of the nature of sexual assault on campuses—specifically higher reported levels of personal estimation of threat and reported preventative behaviors. Implementing public health perspective suggestions of contextualizing crime for university reports on sexual violence can lead to a more accurate understanding of sexual assault and a more correct conversation about this topic overall.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

While this thesis provides meaningful insights about the nature of this university issue, this research is limited in a few ways that future tests of this methodology could make attempts to correct or improve. First, the research is limited by the actual quantity of interview responses that were gathered. A larger sample of university interviews would provide a more thorough look at this issue and would give a more representative picture. Additionally, the research design for investigating the first hypothesis relies on self-report by the departments about their emergency alert procedures. Finally, further in-depth interviews with

universities who use template messages could uncover the process that helped create the message templates—namely, who was responsible for drafting and editing them, were they developed in conjunction with university police, communications, counselors or staff trained in trauma sensitivity, were framing effects considered during their creation, etc.

Next, within the experimental study the demographic breakdown of the sample population limits the generalizability to a larger population. Although the university undergraduates in this test were part of a convenience sample, they make up the ideal target age range for this research. However, the sample population was not representative of diverse ethnicities. Additionally, because sexual assault affects the LGBT community disproportionately, demographic questions asking about sexual orientation and sexual identity would provide another dimension to analysis of perceptions of this issue among student populations. Future research can incorporate other types of contextualizing techniques to see if the reaction is still insignificant for perception of frequency or if one strategy is more effective than others. Finally, this research only provides a single exposure to the treatment. An experimental design which altered the norm (by, for instance, exposing the same participants to thematically framed timely warnings once per week for several weeks) could test the effects of repeated exposure, and might aid recall of the statistics and help with perceptions of frequency.

These limitations do not undermine the importance of this research, but indicate ways in which future research can potentially show greater effects

between treatment groups. Further research into the topic is encouraged, as this is clearly an issue still in progress for many universities working to appropriately handle reports of sexual assault, and to keep the campus student bodies both safe from future occurrences and aware of any present circumstances and dangers.

REFERENCES

Bishop, E. (1993). Reporters ignore context of crime, says criminologist. *St. Louis Journalism Review*, *23*(161), 1-3.

Borah, P. (2011). Conceptual issues in framing theory: A systematic examination of a decade's literature. *Journal of Communication, 61*(2), 246-263. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01539.x

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Campus Safety. (n.d.). *RAINN: Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network*. Retrieved October 20, 2014, from https://www.rainn.org/public-policy/campus-safety

Center for Public Integrity. (2010). *Sexual assault on campus: A frustrating search for justice.* Retrieved from http://www.rjionline.org/sites/default/files/cpi_sexual_assault_on_campus.pdf

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power for the social sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Coleman, R., & Thorson, E. (2002). The effects of news stories that put crime and violence into context: Testing the public health model of reporting. *Journal of Health Communication*, *7*(5), 401-425. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10810730290001783

Culbertson, K., Vik, P., & Kooiman, B. (2001). The impact of sexual assault, sexualassault perpetrator type, and location of sexual assault on ratings of perceived safety. *Violence Against Women*, *7*(8), 858-875. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10778010122182794

Culp-Ressler, T. (2014, September 3). This college student will carry around her dorm mattress until her alleged rapist is punished. *Think Progress*. Retrieved from http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/09/03/3478183/columbia-mattress-protest-sexual-assault/

Dorfman, L., Woodruff, K., Chavez, V., & Wallack, L. (1997). Youth and violence on local television news in California. *American Journal of Public Health*, *87*(8), 1311-1316. http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/ajph.87.8.1311

Druckman, J. N. (2004). Political preference formation: Competition, deliberation, and the (ir)relevance of framing effects. *American Political Science Review*, *98*(04), 671-686. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s0003055404041413

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51-58. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

The Federal Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights. (2012). *Clery Center For Security On Campus*. Retrieved from http://clerycenter.org/federal-campus-sexual-assault-victims%E2%80%99-bill-rights

Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). The sexual victimization of college women. (Report No. NCJ-182369). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/e387392004-001

Fisher, B. S., & Sloan, J. J., III. (2003). Unraveling the fear of victimization among college women: Is the "shadow of sexual assault hypothesis" supported? *Justice Quarterly, 20*(3), 633-659. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07418820300095641

Gray, E. (2014, May 26). The sexual assault crisis on american campuses. *Time*. [Print].

Gross, K. (2008). Framing persuasive appeals: Episodic and thematic framing, emotional response, and policy opinion. *Political Psychology, 29*(2), 169-192. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00622.x

Gross K., & Fine, A. (1990, February). After their daughter is murdered at college, her grieving parents mount a crusade for campus safety. *People, 33*(7), Retrieved from http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20116872,00.html

Haegerich, T. M., & Dahlberg, L. L. (2011). Violence as a public health risk. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, *5*(5), 392–406. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1559827611409127

Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 11*(3), 205-242. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1103_02

Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Iyengar, S. (1990). Framing responsibility for political issues: The case of poverty. *Political Behavior*, *12*(1), 19-40. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf00992330

Jeanne Clery Act text. (2012). *Clery Center for Security on Campus*. Retrieved from http://clerycenter.org/sites/default/files/Jeanne%20Clery%20Act%20Full%20Text.pdf

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society*, 47(2). 263-291. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1914185

Karjane, H. K., Fisher, B. S., & Cullen, F. T. (1999). Campus sexual assault: How America's institutions of higher education respond. Final report, NU Grant. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/e510302006-001

Kingkade, T. (2015, January 21). Two new documentaries will highlight student activism against campus sexual assault. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/21/campus-rape-documentaries_n_6517840.html

Koss, M. P., Gidycz, C. A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *55*, 162-170.

McMahon, P. M. (2000). The public health approach to the prevention of sexual violence. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, *12*(1), 27–36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/107906320001200104

Mercy, J. A., Rosenberg, M. L., Powell, K. E., Broome, C. V., & Roper, W. L. (1993). Public health policy for preventing violence. *Health Affairs*, *12*(4), 7–29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.12.4.7

Morrison, K. (2005). Motivating women and men to take protective action against rape: Examining direct and indirect persuasive fear appeals. *Health Communication*, *18*(3), 237-256. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327027hc1803_3

Our History. (2012). *Clery Center For Security On Campus*. Retrieved from http://clerycenter.org/our-history

Perry, I. (2009). Violence: A public health perspective. *Global Crime*, *10*(4), 368-395. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440570903248395

Rodgers, E. & Thorson, S. (2001). The reporting of crime and violence in the Los Angeles Times: Is there a public health perspective?. *Journal of Health Communication*, *6*(2), 169-182. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10810730120636

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal Of Communication, 49*(1), 103. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/joc/49.1.103

Scheufele, D. A., & Iyengar, S. (2014). The state of framing research: A call for new directions. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication theories.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.47

Schonfeld, Z. (2014, October 30). Hundreds of Columbia students carry mattresses in sexual assault protest. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from http://www.newsweek.com/photos-hundreds-columbia-students-carry-mattresses-sexual-assault-protest-280914

Schuman, S. (2009). *Leading America's branch campuses.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Senn, C. Y., & Dzinas, K. (1996). Measuring fear of rape: A new scale. *Canadian Journal Of Behavioural Science/Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement*, *28*(2), 141-144. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0008-400x.28.2.141

Skogan, W. G., & Maxfield, M. G. (1981). *Coping with crime: Individual and neighborhood reactions* (pp. 59-63). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, M. D. (1988). Women's fear of violent crime: An exploratory test of a feminist hypothesis. *Journal of Family Violence*, *3*(1), 29-38. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf00994664

Stevens, J. E. (1998). Integrating the public health perspective into reporting on violence. *Niemen Reports, 52*(4), 38-40.

Summary of the Jeanne Clery Act. (2012). *Clery Center For Security On Campus*. Retrieved from http://clerycenter.org/summary-jeanne-clery-act

Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). Full report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women Series: Research report. *Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/e514172006-001

VanVoorhis, C. W., & Morgan, B. L. (2007). Understanding power and rules of thumb for determining sample sizes. *Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology, 3*(2), 43-50.

White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. (2014). *Not Alone: The first report of the White House task force to protect students from sexual assault*. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/report_0.pdf

Who Are The Victims? (n.d.). *RAINN: Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network*. Retrieved December 20, 2014, from https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL NOTICE

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Ashley Hesson
Mass Communication

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 16, 2015

RE: **IRB#** E9192

TITLE: Correcting the conversation: An argument for a public health perspective approach to university timely warnings about sexual assault

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 2/13/2015

Approved X **Disapproved**_____

Approval Date: 2/13/2015 **Approval Expiration Date:** 2/12/2018

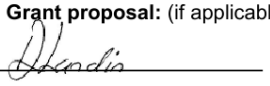
Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a,b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE:**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb*

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you contact students with an emergency alert? (ex: e-mail to student accounts, text or phone call, etc.)
2. Does the school send the blast out to all students or only students who voluntarily enroll? Is this different depending on the medium?
3. What type of emergencies qualify for the emergency alert?
4. Does this alert come from your office or somewhere else on/off campus?
5. Does the school have a template message in place, or are these created and written as needed? (If no template, skip to 8).
6. (If they have a template) Does the school have different templates for different types of emergencies, or one main template?

7a: (If different templates used): Would you be willing to send me a copy of the one your office uses? Specifically, I'm comparing the templates for sexual crimes, like rape, sexual assault, etc. if you have one. If not, any broader template will work.

7b: (If one main template): Would you be willing to send me a copy of the one your office uses?

8: Are these published somewhere after they are sent? Are they kept on file internally?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW CODEBOOK

University name _____

University number in Excel File _____

Date of Interview (mmddyyyy) _____

Q1 - How do you contact students with an emergency alert?

Email

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Text

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Phone call

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Online (website, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

On-campus alert systems (radio, siren, display boards, etc.)

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Q2 - Does your school send the blast out to all students or only students who voluntarily enroll?

1 – Opt-in, voluntary

2 – Opt-out, default

3 – Combination, varies by medium

Q3 - What type of emergencies qualify for the emergency alert?

Severe weather

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Active shooter

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Armed robbery

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Sexual Assault

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Mentioned

Miscellaneous/Other

0 – Not mentioned

1 – Burglary

2 – Fire

3 – Other _____

Q4 - Does the alert come from your office, or somewhere else on campus?

1 – In office

2 – University communication, PR

3 – Combination

4 – Other _____

Q5/6 - Does the school have a template message in place, or are these created and written as needed? (if yes) Does the school have different templates for different types of emergencies, or one main template?

0 – No templates

1 – No template, but some saved / write from an example

2 – No template, but standard language

3 – One/a few templates, used for _____

4 – Multiple templates depending on emergency

Q7 - Would you be willing to send me a copy of the one your office uses?

0 – No

1 – See examples on website

2 – Yes

Q8 - Are these published somewhere after they are sent? Are they kept on file internally?

0 – Neither

1 – Kept internally only

2 – Published online only

3 – Both kept internally and published online

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

1. Study Title: Correcting the conversation: An argument for a public health perspective approach to university timely warnings about sexual assault

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study:
Ashley Hesson (ahesso2@lsu.edu, (740) 442-8206)
Christopher Mann (cmann13@lsu.edu, (225) 578-3912)

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to determine whether a public health perspective approach to university communications about sexual assault can influence student perceptions about sexual assault.

5. Subject Inclusion: Undergraduate college students between the ages of 18 and 65.

6. Number of subjects: 300

7. Study Procedures: Subjects will read a brief sample University emergency alert message, and then complete a questionnaire in response to the message shown. The questionnaire will ask questions about perceptions or response to the announcement, and demographic questions. The entire process will take no longer than 15 minutes.

8. Benefits: This study may yield valuable information about University emergency communication best practices.

9. Risks: Two minimal risks exist to completion of this study: release of sensitive information and discomfort. First, confidentiality will be ensured because the study is completed anonymously and no identifying information will be linked with responses. Second, discomfort regarding sensitive questions can be avoided as subjects are permitted to refuse any question presented or to withdraw entirely at any time without penalty.

10. Right to Refuse: Participation in this study is voluntary. Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Data will remain confidential unless release is legally compelled.

12. Financial information: There is no compensation for participation in this research, beyond that which is provided as a member of the Media Effects Lab subject pool.

13. Signatures:
The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. By clicking continue on this page, I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form.

APPENDIX E
EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI

Control

TIMELY WARNING

January 20, 2015

RAPE REPORT

On January 20, 2015 at approximately 5:00 p.m. the University Police Department received a report from a University official of a rape that occurred on campus. Information received from the reporting party indicated that a female student reported to the University official that she was raped by an unknown individual at approximately 1:00 a.m. on 01/20/15 near the dumpsters outside of the campus residence hall. The victim declined to report the incident to law enforcement. The only available physical description of the alleged perpetrator is that the act was committed by a male, approximately 6'. No further details of the incident are available at this time.

If anyone has information that may be related to this or any other criminal act, we would ask that they please contact the University Police Department as soon as possible at 800-888-0000.

Treatment A: Statistics

TIMELY WARNING

January 20, 2015

RAPE REPORT

On January 20, 2015 at approximately 5:00 p.m. the University Police Department received a report from a University official of a rape that occurred on campus. Information received from the reporting party indicated that a female student reported to the University official that she was raped by an unknown individual at approximately 1:00 a.m. on 01/20/15 near the dumpsters outside of the campus residence hall. The victim declined to report the incident to law enforcement. The only available physical description of the alleged perpetrator is that the act was committed by a male, approximately 6'. No further details of the incident are available at this time.

Sexual assault is not an isolated incident. Research indicates that a university with 10,000 students experiences as many as 350 rapes per year. The University Police Department urges all students, faculty, and staff to report suspicious activity or individuals to law enforcement immediately.

If anyone has information that may be related to this or any other criminal act, we would ask that they please contact the University Police Department as soon as possible at 800-888-0000.

Treatment B: Strategies

TIMELY WARNING

January 20, 2015

RAPE REPORT

On January 20, 2015 at approximately 5:00 p.m. the University Police Department received a report from a University official of a rape that occurred on campus. Information received from the reporting party indicated that a female student reported to the University official that she was raped by an unknown individual at approximately 1:00 a.m. on 01/20/15 near the dumpsters outside of the campus residence hall. The victim declined to report the incident to law enforcement. The only available physical description of the alleged perpetrator is that the act was committed by a male, approximately 6'. No further details of the incident are available at this time.

The University Police Department urges all students, faculty, and staff to follow personal safety strategies. Be aware of your surroundings, travel with a group when possible, never leave your drink unattended, and report suspicious activity or individuals to law enforcement immediately. While there are risk factors associated with sexual assault, being at risk in no way shifts responsibility for sexual assault to a victim/survivor.

If anyone has information that may be related to this or any other criminal act, we would ask that they please contact the University Police Department as soon as possible at 800-888-0000.

Treatment C: Combination

TIMELY WARNING

January 20, 2015

RAPE REPORT

On January 20, 2015 at approximately 5:00 p.m. the University Police Department received a report from a University official of a rape that occurred on campus. Information received from the reporting party indicated that a female student reported to the University official that she was raped by an unknown individual at approximately 1:00 a.m. on 01/20/15 near the dumpsters outside of the campus residence hall. The victim declined to report the incident to law enforcement. The only available physical description of the alleged perpetrator is that the act was committed by a male, approximately 6'. No further details of the incident are available at this time.

Sexual assault is not an isolated incident. Research indicates that a university with 10,000 students experiences as many as 350 rapes per year. The University Police Department urges all students, faculty, and staff to report suspicious activity or individuals to law enforcement immediately, and follow personal safety strategies. Be aware of your surroundings, travel with a group when possible, never leave your drink unattended, and report suspicious activity or individuals to law enforcement immediately. While there are risk factors associated with sexual assault, being at risk in no way shifts responsibility for sexual assault to a victim/survivor.

If anyone has information that may be related to this or any other criminal act, we would ask that they please contact the University Police Department as soon as possible at 800-888-0000.

APPENDIX F
POST-TEST QUESTIONS

Below is the full list of questions used in the post-test survey, organized by the category of response being measured:

Frequency

- How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs on college campuses?

  7-point Likert-type scale – very frequently to never (adapted from CBS News Poll, April 2013)

- How often would you say rape or sexual assault occurs in the U.S.?

  7-point Likert-type scale – very frequently to never (adapted from CBS News Poll, April 2013)

- Approximately how many rapes occur each year on a campus the size of LSU (a population of about 30,000 students)? ___

- Approximately how many rapes occur each year in the United States (a population of about 319,000,000 people)? ___

Threat Perception

***Randomly ordered Likert-style questions, adapted from Senn & Dzinas's (1996)*

Fear of Rape Scale

4 point Likert-type scale - very safe to very unsafe

+ How safe do you feel going into public washrooms in convenience stores or malls?

+ How safe do you feel in your apartment/house when you are by yourself?

4 point Likert-type scale: always, occasionally, rarely, never

- I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.
- I avoid going out alone at night.
- I ask friends to walk me to my car/the bus stop if it is late at night.
- I think about the shoes/clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.
- When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.
+ I feel confident walking alone late at night.
- I am afraid of being sexually assaulted.
- If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.
- I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.
- When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.
- The possibility of rape affects my freedom of movement.
- How often do you, yourself, worry about being sexually assaulted?

Covariate (adapted from Fisher & Sloan (2003))

- Has a close friend or relative of yours been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)? Y N
- Have you ever been the victim of sexual violence (rape or sexual assault)? Y N
    - Was the offender of the above crime known to you? Y N

Demographics

- Gender Male Female
- Age (drop-down choice between 13 and 99)
- Ethnicity

  American Indian or Alaska Native

  Asian

  Black or African American

  Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

  White

  Other (blank provided)

Other

- Please use this space to write anything else you would like to add. (This question is optional).
- Please enter your 5-digit MEL id number below in order to receive credit for this study:

VITA

Ashley Hesson is a Master's student at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication where she will receive her degree in May 2015. As a graduate research assistant for the department, she co-authored two academic publications--one about media framing in women's gymnastics in the 2012 Olympics and one about health communication encouraging African-American women to get mammograms. She belongs to Kappa Tau Alpha, a mass communication honor society for those in the top ten percent of their graduate classes. She is from Barboursville, West Virginia and received a Bachelor's degree in advertising from Marshall University in 2012. In her sophomore year at Marshall, she studied abroad in Bulgaria.

Professionally, she is interested in institutional communication and has a background in nonprofit communication, having done design, event planning, website development, and media planning for Huntington Area Food Bank, Cabell County Family Resource Network, and Cabell County Student Empowerment Team. After graduation, she plans to marry fellow scholar Will Glass and move to New Orleans to work.